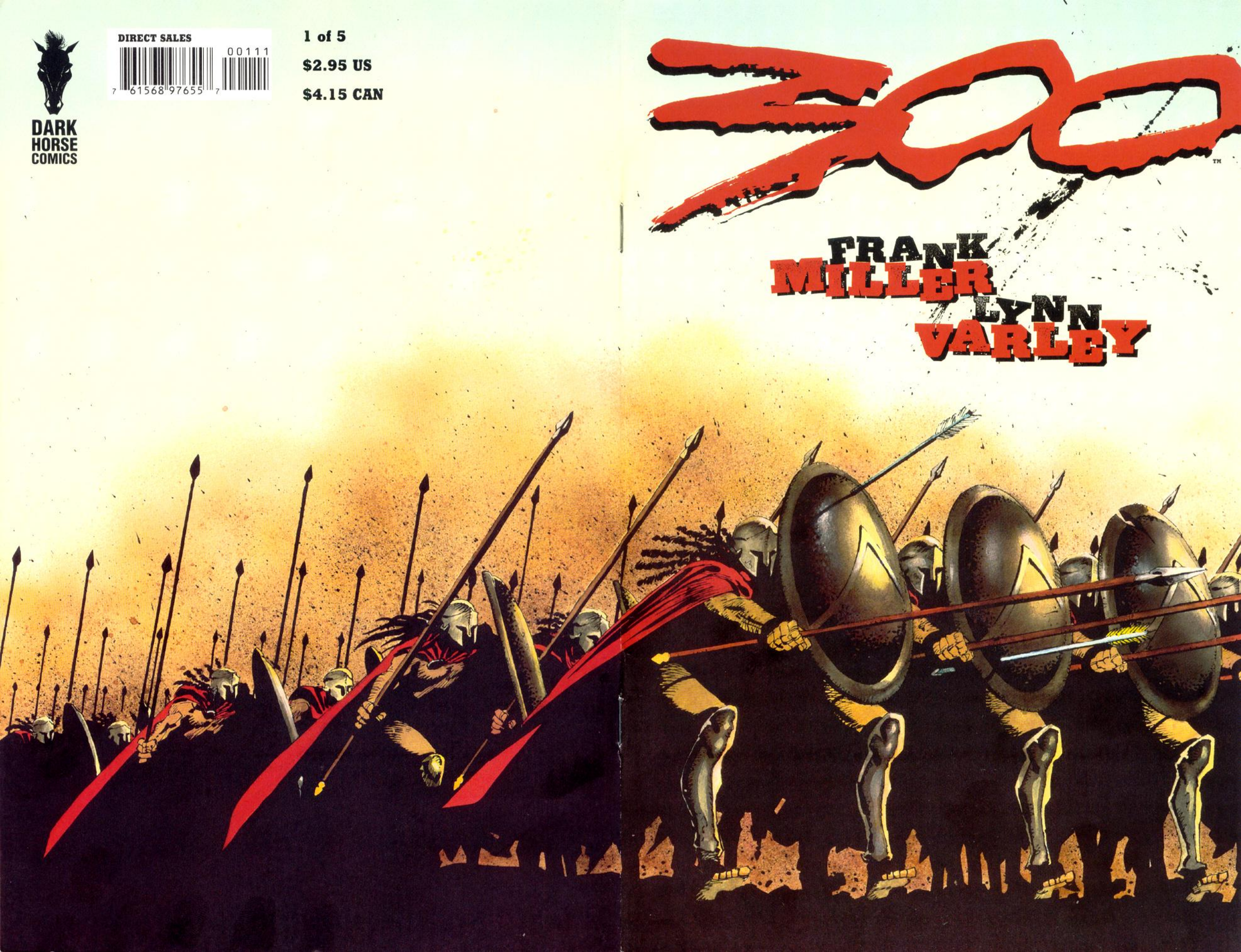
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Scan by Fett!!

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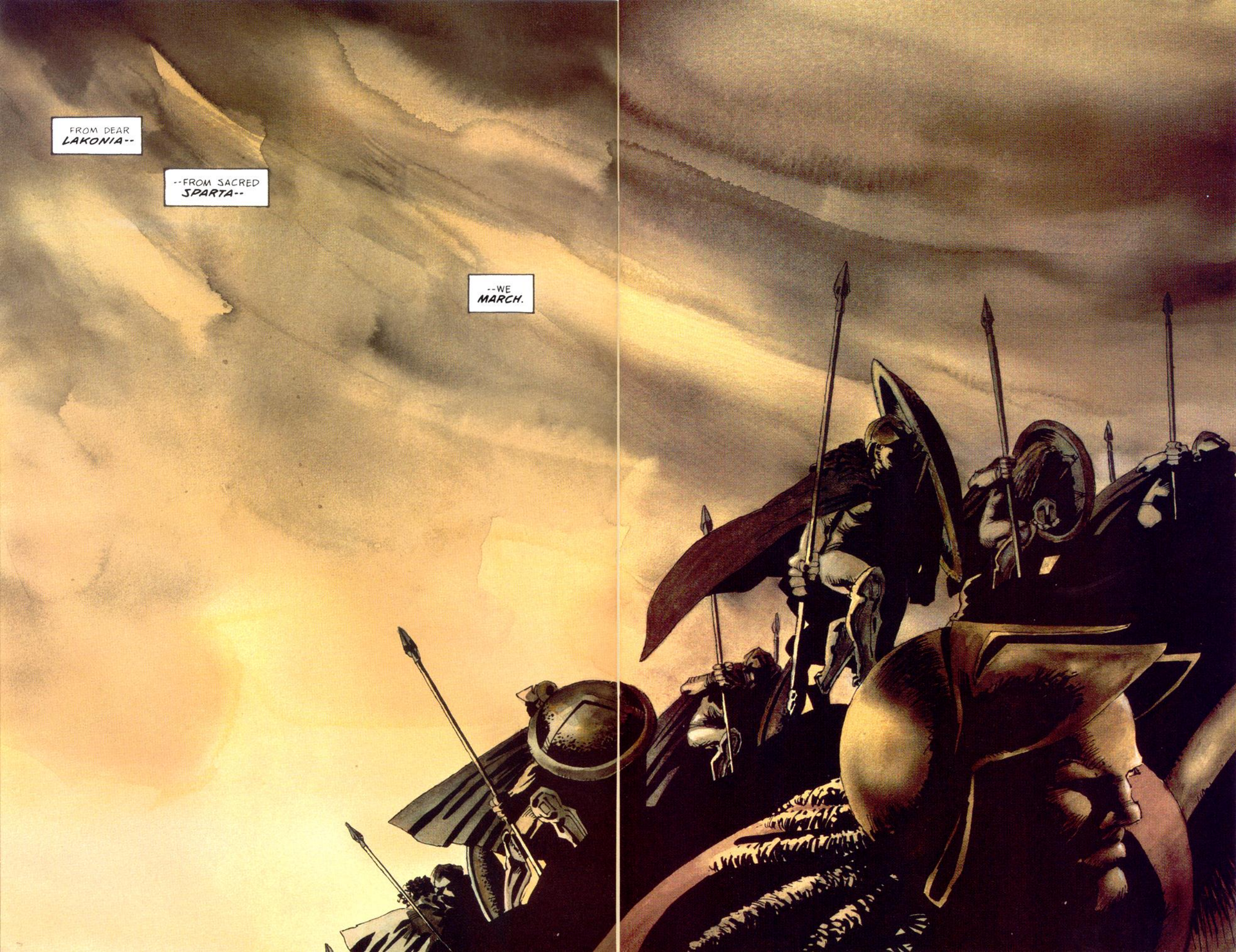
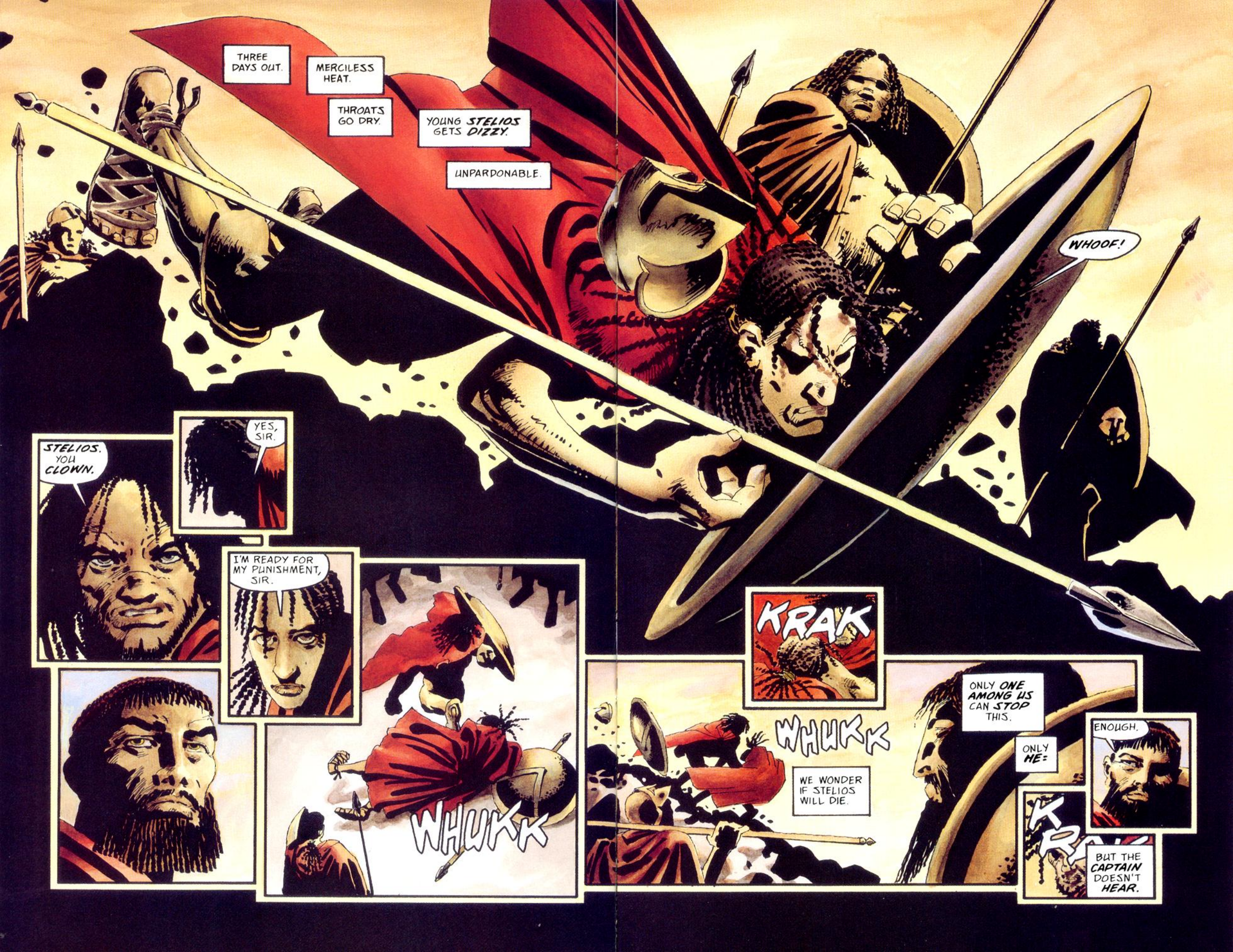
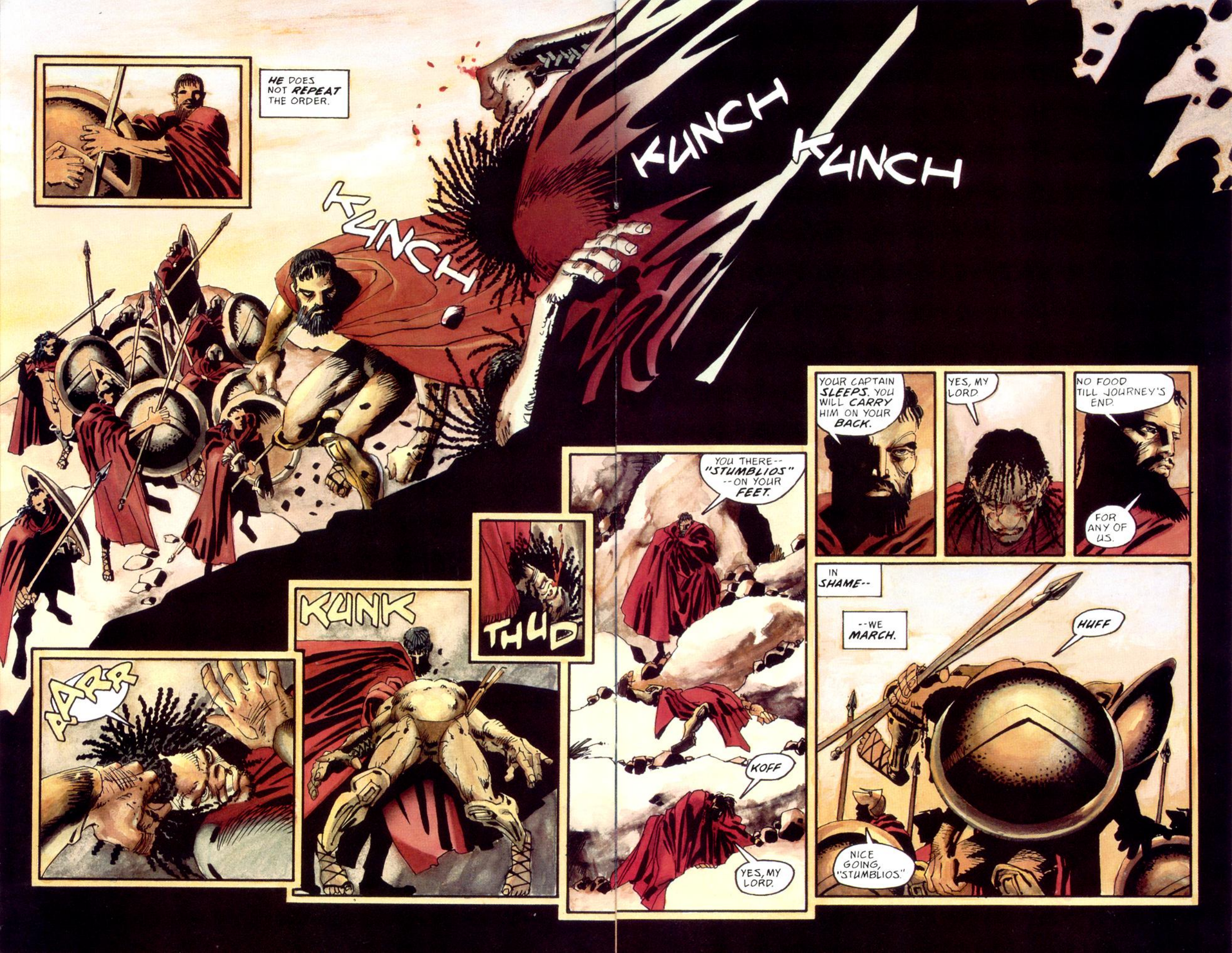
WE
MARCH.


FROM DEAR LAKONIA--
--FROM SACRED SPARTA--
--WE MARCH.

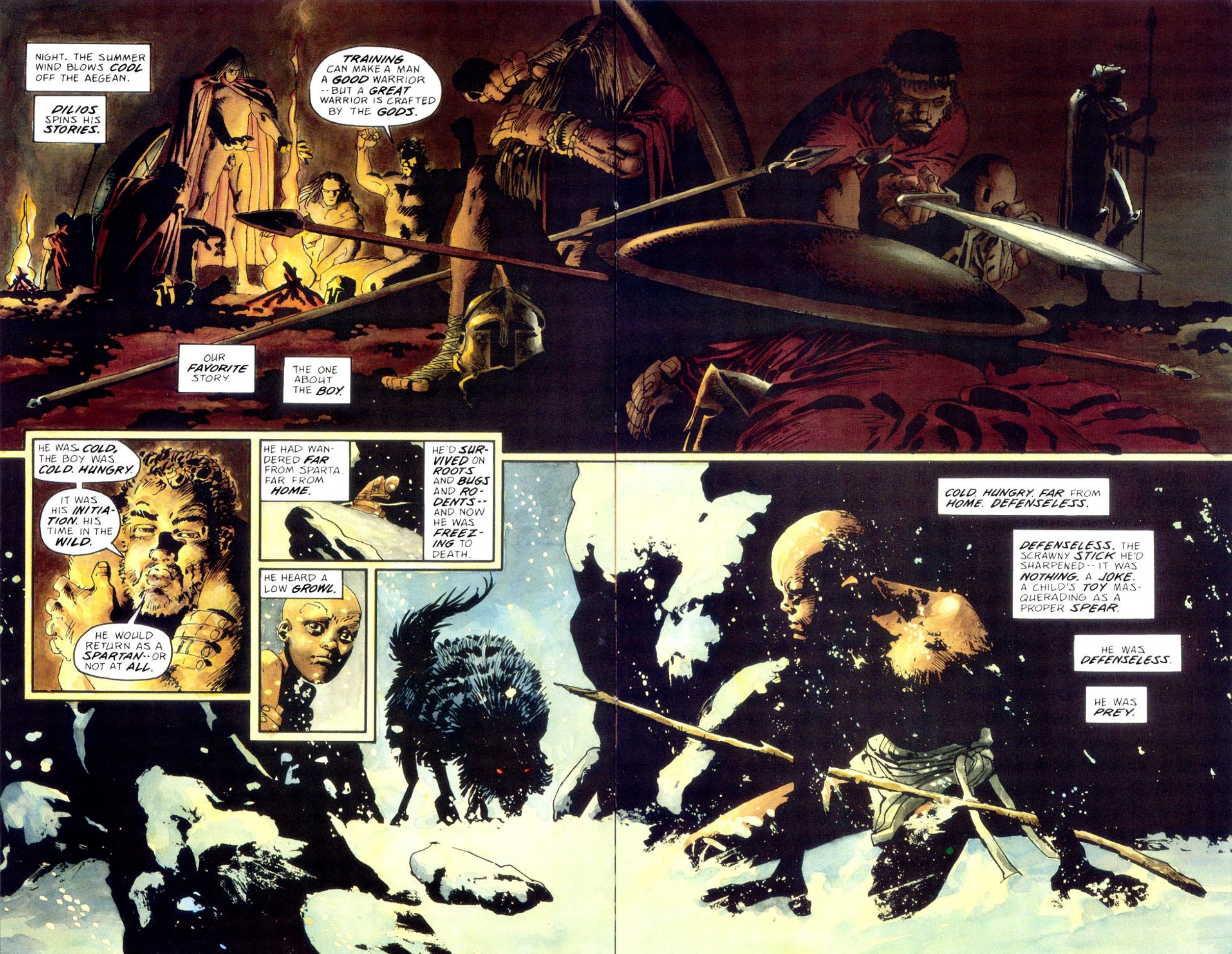
FOR HONOR'S SAKE--
--FOR GLORY'S SAKE--
--WE MARCH.

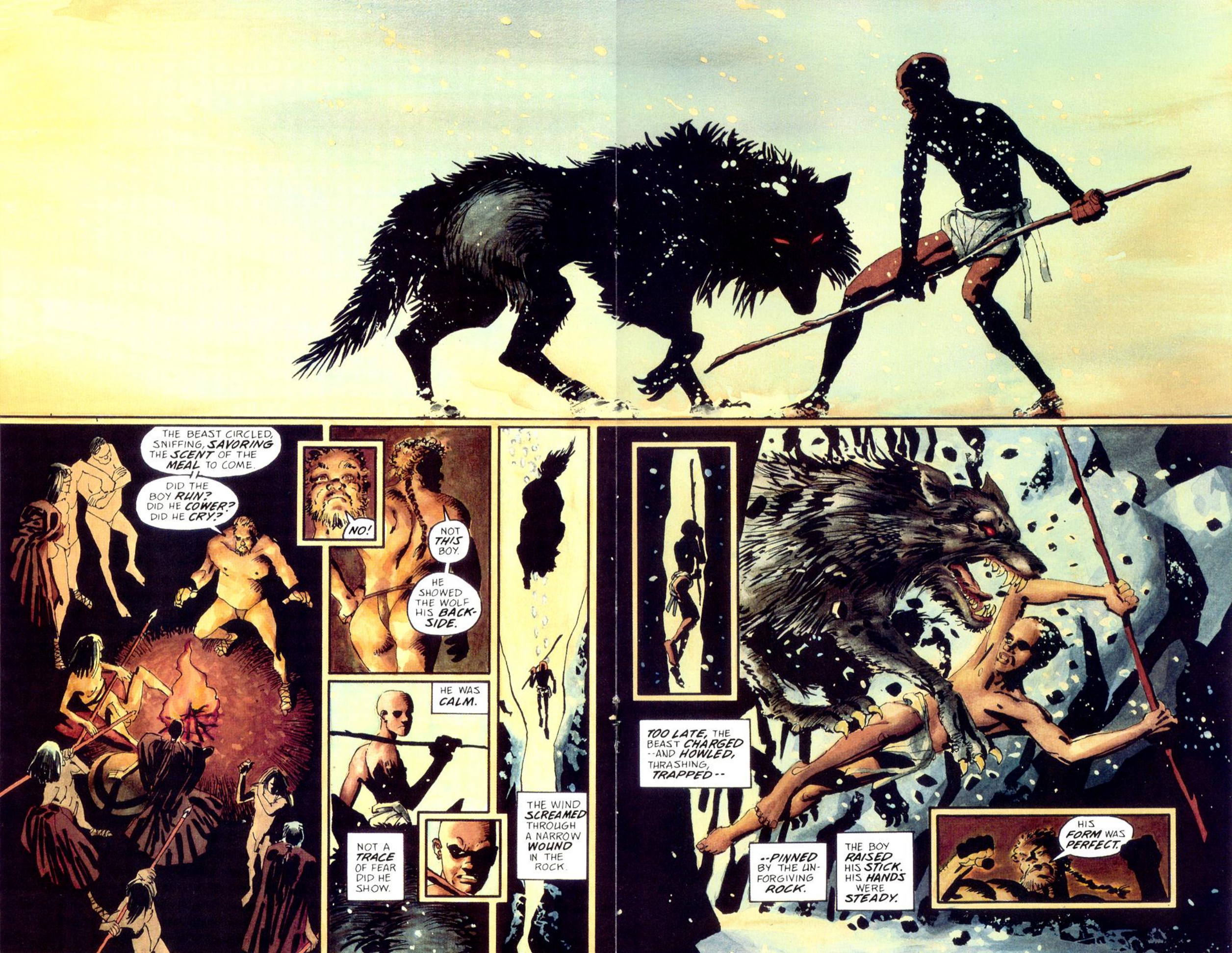
480 B.C.


THREE DAYS OUT.
MERCILESS HEAT.
THROATS GO DRY.
YOUNG STELIOS GETS DIZZY.
UNPARDONABLE.
WHOOF!
STELIOS. YOU CLOWN.
YES, SIR.
I'M READY FOR MY PUNISHMENT, SIR.
WHUKK
KRAK
WHUKK
WE WONDER IF STELIOS WILL DIE.
ONLY ONE AMONG US CAN STOP THIS.
ONLY HE:
ENOUGH.
BUT THE CAPTAIN DOESN'T HEAR.

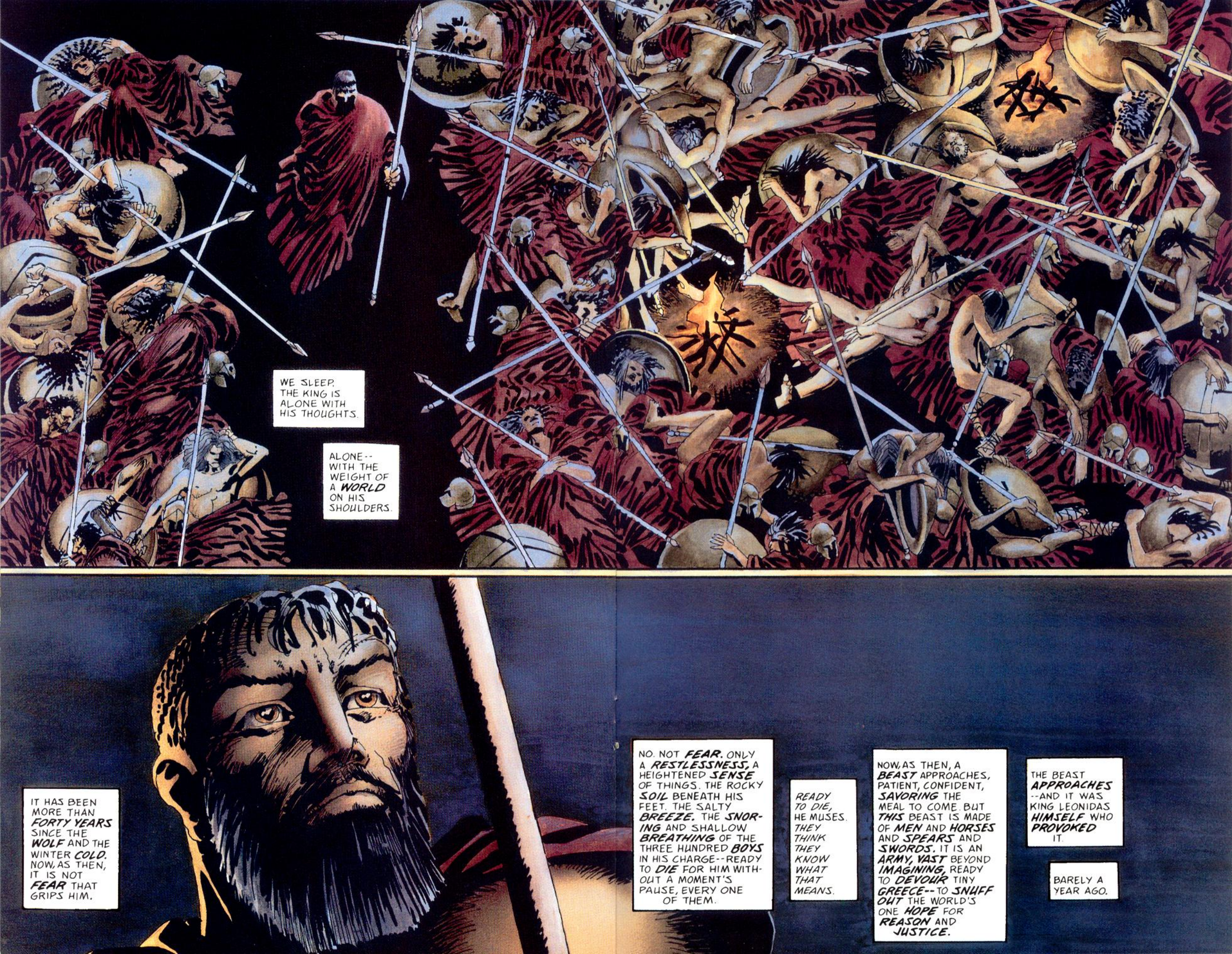


HE DOES NOT REPEAT THE ORDER.
KUNCH
KUNCH
KUNCH
AARR
KUNK
THUD
YOU THERE-- "STUMBLIOS" --ON YOUR FEET.
KOFF
YES, MY LORD.
YOUR CAPTAIN SLEEPS. YOU WILL CARRY HIM ON YOUR BACK.
YES, MY LORD.
NO FOOD TILL JOURNEY'S END.
FOR ANY OF US.
IN SHAME--
--WE MARCH.
HUFF
NICE GOING, "STUMBLIOS."

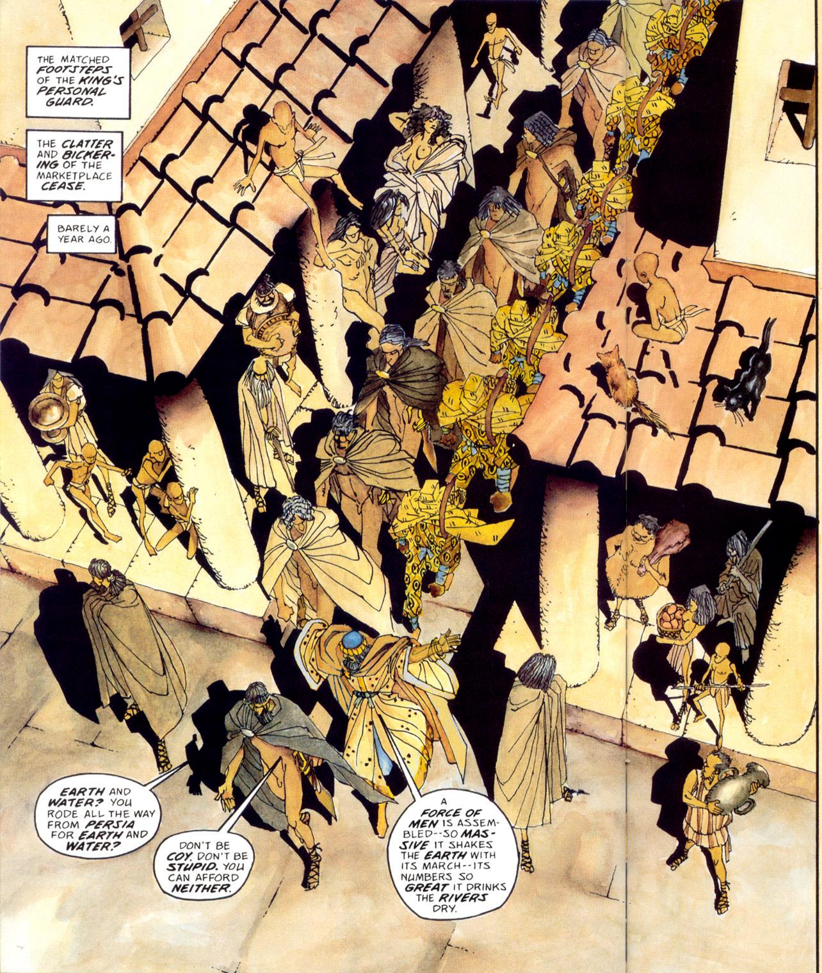

NIGHT. THE SUMMER WIND BLOWS COOL OFF THE AEGEAN.
DILIOS SPINS HIS STORIES.
TRAINING CAN MAKE A MAN A GOOD WARRIOR --BUT A GREAT WARRIOR IS CRAFTED BY THE GODS.
OUR FAVORITE STORY.
THE ONE ABOUT THE BOY.
HE WAS COLD, THE BOY WAS. COLD. HUNGRY.
IT WAS HIS INITIATION. HIS TIME IN THE WILD.
HE WOULD RETURN AS A SPARTAN--OR NOT AT ALL.
HE HAD WANDERED FAR FROM SPARTA. FAR FROM HOME.
HE'D SURVIVED ON ROOTS AND BUGS AND RODENTS--AND NOW HE WAS FREEZING TO DEATH.
HE HEARD A LOW GROWL.
COLD. HUNGRY. FAR FROM HOME. DEFENSELESS.
DEFENSELESS. THE SCRAWNY STICK HE'D SHARPENED--IT WAS NOTHING. A JOKE. A CHILD'S TOY MASQUERADING AS A PROPER SPEAR.
HE WAS DEFENSELESS.
HE WAS PREY.


THE BEAST CIRCLED, SNIFFING, SAVORING THE SCENT OF THE MEAL TO COME.
DID THE BOY RUN? DID HE COWER? DID HE CRY?
NO!
NOT THIS BOY.
HE SHOWED THE WOLF HIS BACK-SIDE.
HE WAS CALM.
NOT A TRACE OF FEAR DID HE SHOW.
THE WIND SCREAMED THROUGH A NARROW WOUND IN THE ROCK.
TOO LATE, THE BEAST CHARGED --AND HOWLED, THRASHING, TRAPPED--
--PINNED BY THE UN-FORGIVING ROCK.
THE BOY RAISED HIS STICK. HIS HANDS WERE STEADY.
HIS FORM WAS PERFECT.

AND SO THE BOY, GIVEN UP FOR DEAD--
--RETURNED A KING.
OUR KING!
HNH?
LEONIDAS!
LEONIDAS!
CHILDREN. SUCH NOISE.
GET YOUR SLEEP.


WE SLEEP. THE KING IS ALONE WITH HIS THOUGHTS.
ALONE-- WITH THE WEIGHT OF A WORLD ON HIS SHOULDERS.
IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN FORTY YEARS SINCE THE WOLF AND THE WINTER COLD. NOW, AS THEN, IT IS NOT FEAR THAT GRIPS HIM.
NO. NOT FEAR. ONLY A RESTLESSNESS, A HEIGHTENED SENSE OF THINGS. THE ROCKY SOIL BENEATH HIS FEET. THE SALTY BREEZE. THE SNORING AND SHALLOW BREATHING OF THE THREE HUNDRED BOYS IN HIS CHARGE--READY TO DIE FOR HIM WITHOUT A MOMENT'S PAUSE, EVERY ONE OF THEM.
READY TO DIE, HE MUSES. THEY THINK THEY KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.
NOW, AS THEN, A BEAST APPROACHES, PATIENT, CONFIDENT, SAVORING THE MEAL TO COME. BUT THIS BEAST IS MADE OF MEN AND HORSES AND SPEARS AND SWORDS. IT IS AN ARMY, VAST BEYOND IMAGINING, READY TO DEVOUR TINY GREECE--TO SNUFF OUT THE WORLD'S ONE HOPE FOR REASON AND JUSTICE.
THE BEAST APPROACHES --AND IT WAS KING LEONIDAS HIMSELF WHO PROVOKED IT.
BARELY A YEAR AGO.

BARELY A YEAR AGO.
SPARTA.
UNINVITED GUESTS.
SHOW ME TO YOUR KING.
I BRING WORD FROM GREAT XERXES.
I DON'T KNOW. OUR KING'S A VERY BUSY MAN.
AND HE'S GOT AN ACUTE SENSE OF SMELL, PERSIAN. COULD WE OFFER YOU A BATH?
I'M SURE OUR WOMEN HAVE A PERFUME YOU'LL FIND AGREEABLE.
GREEK ARROGANCE. IT WILL BE THE DEATH OF YOU ALL.
BE AFRAID. SPARTA WILL BURN TO THE GROUND. ONLY THE WORD OF KING LEONIDAS CAN SAVE IT.
HE SOUNDS SERIOUS. MAYBE WE SHOULD TELL THE KING.
YEAH, I SUPPOSE. WE DON'T WANT ANYBODY SAYING SPARTANS AREN'T GOOD HOSTS.

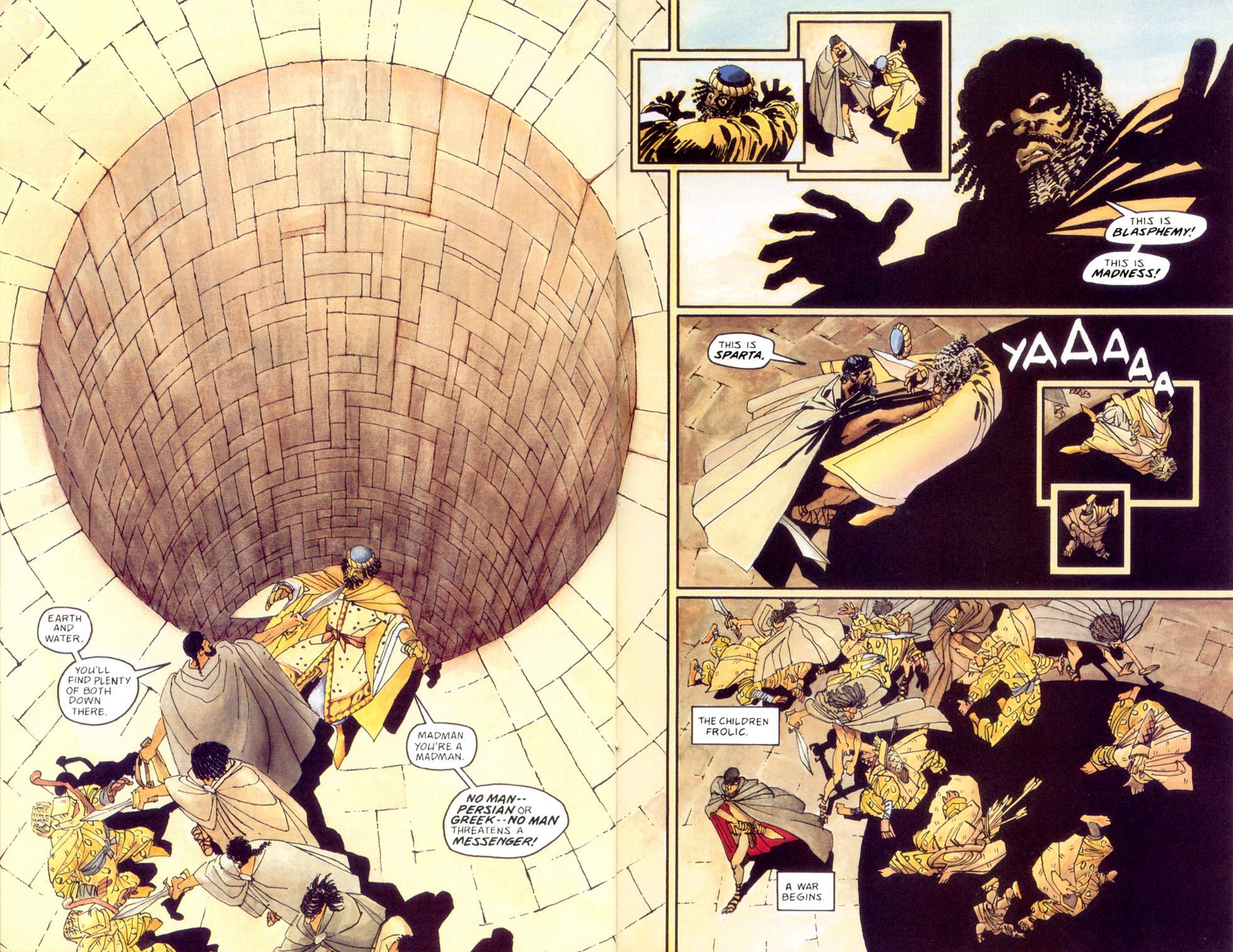


THE MATCHED FOOTSTEPS OF THE KING'S PERSONAL GUARD.
THE CLATTER AND BICKERING OF THE MARKETPLACE CEASE.
BARELY A YEAR AGO.
EARTH AND WATER? YOU RODE ALL THE WAY FROM PERSIA FOR EARTH AND WATER?
DON'T BE COY. DON'T BE STUPID. YOU CAN AFFORD NEITHER.
A FORCE OF MEN IS ASSEMBLED--SO MASSIVE IT SHAKES THE EARTH WITH ITS MARCH--ITS NUMBERS SO GREAT IT DRINKS THE RIVERS DRY.

ALL THE GOD-KING REQUIRES IS A MODEST OFFERING--OF EARTH AND WATER--A SIMPLE TOKEN OF SPARTA'S SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF XERXES.
HM. THAT'S A BIT OF A PROBLEM.
RUMOR HAS IT THE ATHENIANS HAVE ALREADY TURNED YOU DOWN. AND IF THOSE BOY-LOVERS FOUND THAT KIND OF NERVE...

...AFTER ALL, WE SPARTANS HAVE OUR REPUTATION TO CONSIDER. STILL, I'D HATE TO BE RUDE. THERE'S GOT TO BE A DIPLOMATIC WAY TO HANDLE THIS.
CHOOSE YOUR NEXT WORDS CAREFULLY.

OF COURSE. IT'S OBVIOUS. THE ANSWER'S RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME.



EARTH AND WATER.
YOU'LL FIND PLENTY OF BOTH DOWN THERE.
MADMAN. YOU'RE A MADMAN.
NO MAN-- PERSIAN OR GREEK--NO MAN THREATENS A MESSENGER!
THIS IS BLASPHEMY!
THIS IS MADNESS!
THIS IS SPARTA.
YAAAAA
THE CHILDREN FROLIC.
A WAR BEGINS.

SLINGS & ARROWS

c/o Dark Horse Comics, 10956 SE Main Street, Portland, Oregon 97222
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Editor Diana Schutz circulated a few photocopies of this issue to get people talking — and writing. Please join in — and you don't have to be as kind as these good folks were. Honest.

— FM

Michael C. McClelland
Hollywood, CA

I was coming home from work. Tired. Exhausted. Grumpy. I checked the mail. A package from Dark Horse? I ripped open the package as I ran up the stairs. I was stunned at what I saw. Big beautiful art with exquisite painted color. I walked through the door and immediately plopped on the floor and read it. I couldn't stop myself. Suddenly I was having a great day.

It is all double-page spreads, but unlike the typical "pinup"-type double-page spreads we usually see, these are more like separate paintings that tell a sequential story. This is some of the best stuff I have seen from Frank Miller. The art is very fresh and alive. Finely detailed. Powerful. Passionate. The colors by Lynn Varley are vibrant. Luscious. These two have actually surpassed their work on *Ronin*. The story itself is very tight and well-paced. At first you think you are going to read this like a simple coloring book, but before you know it, Frank has drawn you back to 480 B.C., into ancient Greece. By the end, I turned the last page and found myself *craving* more.

This is Frank Miller at the top of his game. For Frank Miller fans it is not to be missed. For those not so enamored with Frank — this will change your mind.

Most artists would be happy with any *one* of Frank Miller's many creations, but Frank continues to grow and stretch his talent to new limits. Just when you think you've seen all Frank's tricks, he produces new and more exciting ones. *300* suggests to me a comic book that perhaps Akira Kurosawa might have done if he were an artist of comic books.

300 is a perfect example of what an artist can achieve when free to take blank canvas and work it without censors, restrictions, and ratings. Frank Miller, you are a living testament to the importance of preserving our First Amendment rights.

Ben Varkentine
Seattle, WA

Damn. That was my reaction to the first couple pages of the preview copy of *300*. And I mean that in a good, admiring way. The opening pages are so sparsely (appropriately) written that I focused on the drawing, and I particularly took time to absorb the use of color, especially in the backgrounds. If, as Diana says in her letter, these Xerox color copies (good enough on their own) do not do justice to Lynn's colors, then I am very curious to see them in the series.

As the story began to gather steam, I spent less time lingering on the drawings and more following the story. The "caption" giving the time frame is very nicely done. The shadow makes it seem very three-dimensional. I might even wonder if any of the soldiers will look up and see it.

The fight involving "Stumblios," the king, and the captain is powerful. And the sound effects are more disconcerting than any gore could ever be.

The story of the boy and the wolf is good, as well. The telling of it is vivid, in such a way that it tells us something not just about the boy who became king, but the men who follow and celebrate him. And his reaction tells us more: that he can be a good and humble king, concerned with the well-being of his men, above his own tribute — which makes the revelation that he started the war they are marching into a bit of a shocker.

Equally vivid is the messenger's arrival in Sparta. From what is — after all — only a few lines and colors, I can see the whole thing in my mind and get an idea of the kind of place Sparta is.

A word about the double-page spread format: I've mentioned in letters to *Sin City*'s lettercol that I admire the way you've taken criticized facets of comics in recent years — pinups that replace storytelling — and shown how they can work without sacrificing art and craft. Here, you blow everything you've ever done in that regard out of the water.

To sum up: in the early pages I had my breath taken away by the drawing and colors, but by the end I was sucked in by the story. I can say — and there's no exaggeration here — that when I turned the last page my honest reaction was: what do you mean I have to wait 'til *June* to find out what happens next?

Thanks for the good work, Frank.

Kurt A. Meyer
Beech Grove, IN

You break the rules. You ignore the status quo. You shake things up. You have the guts to tell the

stories you want to tell. I have often wondered what a war comic would be like if you and Lynn Varley were involved. Now I know.

300 is a war comic, but a war comic unlike any ever seen. *300* breaks the rules, because no one does war comics today. *300* is not the status quo, because never before has a story like this been done in this medium. *300* shakes things up. Imagine using a double-page spread to showcase a story this grand in scale, rather than using it as an excuse for pinups of gun-toting, big-breasted women in impossible poses. Most of all, *300* shows a lot of guts because, as I said, this is uncharted territory. No comic has ever come together quite like this before.

Over the course of three wonderful double-page spreads you set a tone. "We march" are the words that are repeated over and over. Three hundred men march for honor and glory, and instantly I am among them. When Stelios stumbles and is chastised, I feel his weariness and pain. As the 300 listen to the epic of Leonidas, I smell the campfire and hear Dilios' voice in my mind. The great battle we know is coming is foreshadowed in the tale of the young man who will be king, and a chill runs down my spine. Then, a recollection of a pivotal moment in history as seen firsthand:

"This is *blasphemy*! This is *madness*!"

"This is *Sparta*."

Thank you both. *This* is comics!

Joe Hollon
Wilmington, OH

The first thing *300* brings to my mind is the versatility of your storytelling. In a year's time you have taken your readers through the streets of Basin City, flown us in a spaceship to save the world, and now we find ourselves preparing for a battle between ancient Sparta and Persia. Not many comics professionals cover such broad topics in their entire careers. And through all the many settings of your stories the thing you do consistently that separates you from your many contemporaries is to make your readers feel the emotions of your characters. In *300* #1 this emotion came when King Leonidas was shown walking among his sleeping troops. *"Ready to die*, he muses. *They think they know what that means*." Then that page ends with a description of their opponents, the *"army, vast* beyond *imagining*, ready to *devour* tiny *Greece* — to *snuff out* the world's one *hope* for *reason* and *justice*." A small army of 300 Spartans against the unimaginable might of 300,000 Persians — it seems hopeless. It seems not even worthy of attention. But I know they are characters from a Frank Miller comic, and they won't go down without a fight! I can't wait for issue #2.

Michael Hendricks
Kingsville, TX

There are so many skillful achievements in *300* #1, I hardly know where to begin. The dim pallor of the sky at the very beginning gives way to the illuminant brilliance of a new dawn adorning the Spartans' crossing of a hill. The hunched posture of Leonidas as he approaches the "punishment" of the fallen soldier, resembling the lowered gaze of the ravenous wolf in the next scene, heightens the power of the king's menacing gaze. Only the soldier's blade reflects light in the darkness of the camp. The debris surrounding the thrashing of the trapped wolf depicts this violent action much more perfectly than any sound effects. Young Leonidas returning home, his head turned aside not in surprise but in expectation (the exact same way he greeted the wolf), elevates his stature to that of true myth: a god among mortals. The Persian riders behind the messenger bear the same colors as the sky around them, as if they were ghostly apparitions arriving out of nothingness. The vivid contrast between the simple dress of the Spartans and the elaborate clothing of the Persians expertly reveals the profound differences between these two societies: one harsh, the other avaricious. The final shot of the Persians being forced into the deep pit holds all of the feverish energy of live animation.

The employment of words and images throughout is very sparse, your craft becoming closer to that of a poet rather than a mere "director." Black is used heavily (no surprise there!), making Lynn's job exceedingly difficult in places, yet she makes it look effortless, accomplishing more with several colors than most could accomplish with dozens. This book may receive criticism. I can only hope its critics will recognize what it does before ripping it: it takes an ancient story and makes it relevant today, by using techniques worthy of study by artists and fans alike.

Or, in other words: you and Lynn still kill the chicken!

And on another subject entirely . . .

Bruce Garrett
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

I have been reading and enjoying *Sin City* since *The Big Fat Kill*, and your letters column has given me food for thought. Although I agree with most of your viewpoints, there are some things I've thought about that I would like you to consider.

First of all, it is true that there are no ratings systems or cover advisories in the publishing world. But a most likely reason is that most kids haven't been reading literature for the last few decades — at least not since electronic media have been around. Oh, sure, they'll read if it's a homework assignment, but that's it. Why read a book when you can watch the TV adaptation? Now, imagine if kids had been devouring literature the same way they now devour McRoadkill, Spice Girl pap, and superhero comics. I would bet my left nut that a ratings system of some kind would have been slapped down by now. I'm sure the pro-censor forces would want to prevent the possibility of a 12-year-old boy getting morally corrupted by the latest Jackie Collins fuckfest. As a result, all Douglas Coupland novels and the latest issue of *Spin* would have PG-13 slapped all over their covers.

As for cover advisories in comics, I have no use for them now. On the other hand, if DC didn't use the "Suggested for Mature Readers" advisory on all of its Vertigo books, do you think they would even dare publish comic books like *Preacher* or *The Invisibles*? The same guys who are well known to

the public at large for publishing all-ages fare like *Looney Tunes*, *Superman*, and *Flash*? I doubt it, and I'm personally thankful they did. You should be, too. After all, it was "mature" DC books such as *Sandman* and *Hellblazer* that introduced me to types of comic books other than the superhero slugfests. If I hadn't read these books and discovered what was possible with the comic book as an art form, I probably wouldn't even have bothered with independent books like *Sin City*. No, I'd still be reading nothing more than the latest X-crement. There likely are other people like me who owe their acquired tastes for independent comic books to DC's "Suggested for Mature Readers" Vertigo line.

I agree with your stance that the Comics Code Authority should be taken to the lake in a sack with a heavy rock. However, I read somewhere recently that large retail chains, such as Wal-Mart, Safeway, and 7-11, will sell only Code-approved books. No big deal if you're an urbanite, since there are plenty of comics stores to choose from. But for those living in Wanker, Missouri, or Bumblefuck, Saskatchewan, the local Safeway or 7-11 is the only place in town where one can buy comic books. If you were Marvel or DC, would you not want to sell comic books to the rural/small-town audience? I think that in order to kill the Code, these mega-chains and their distributors have to wake up and realize what comic books are all about these days and who are buying them. Convince the Wal-Marts to drop the Code, and the Big Two will likely follow suit. This may be an undertaking of a decidedly uphill nature, since these stores are notorious for selling censored versions of CDs (Nirvano's *In Utero* comes to mind) and banning magazines like *Playboy*. Powerful retailers are just as bad as politicians when it comes to censorship. By the way, how do non-Code comic-book publishers like Dark Horse market their comic books to people living in Wrinkletit, Arkansas, or other little one-horse towns where there are no comics stores?

To me, DC's "advisories" are just plain silly, since they work so hard designing their covers to make it obvious what isn't for kids. Do you think you'd even notice if that diamond-point-type apology were missing?

And, oh, that damn Comics Code. You try soaping it out, you try scrubbing it out . . . Word is, newsstand distributors and those clowns at Wal-Mart have put the squeeze on comics publishers, including Dark Horse. Their timing was good, for them at least: with the direct market in disarray, losing newsstand sales could mean the death of many a title. Leave us say the thugs won.

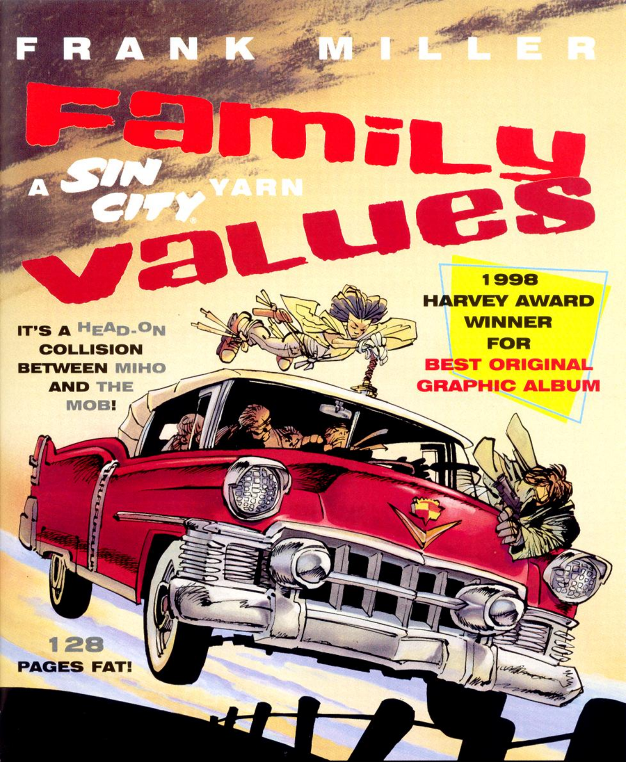
But you won't be seeing that cancerous stamp on any of my books.

Thanks to all for writing. See you next issue.

— Frank Miller

Next issue:

DUTY



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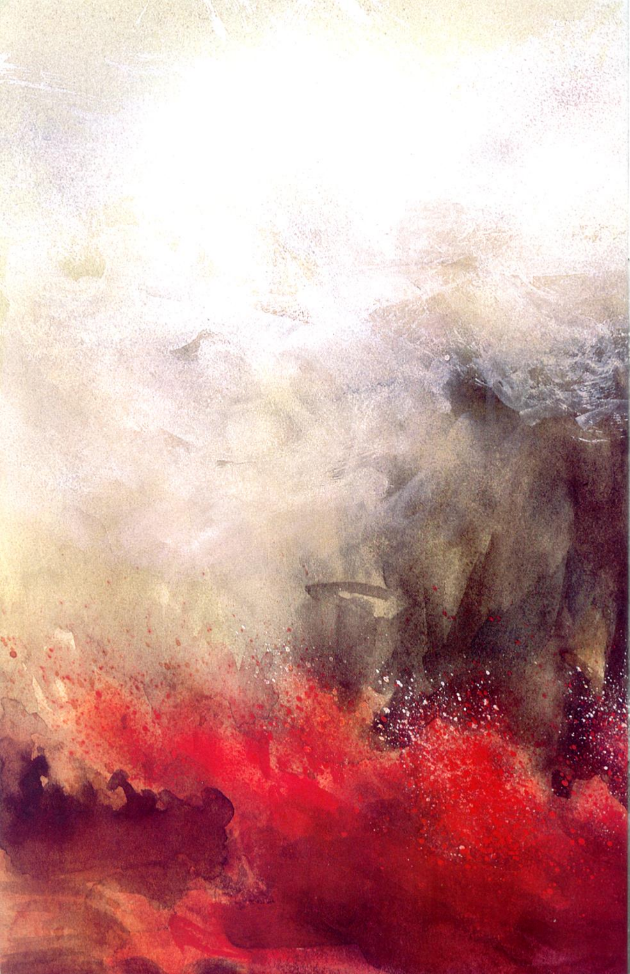

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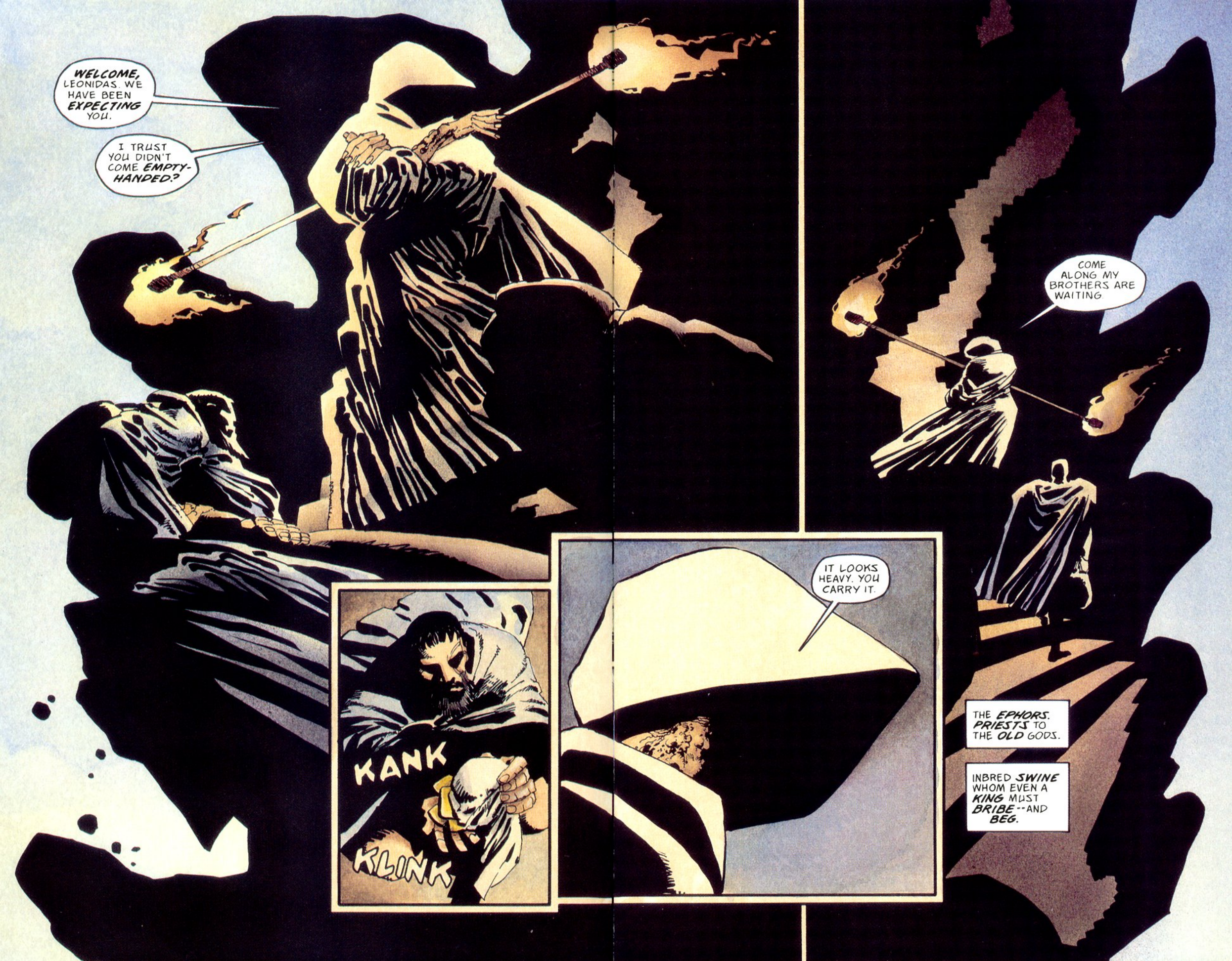
CHAPTER TWO:

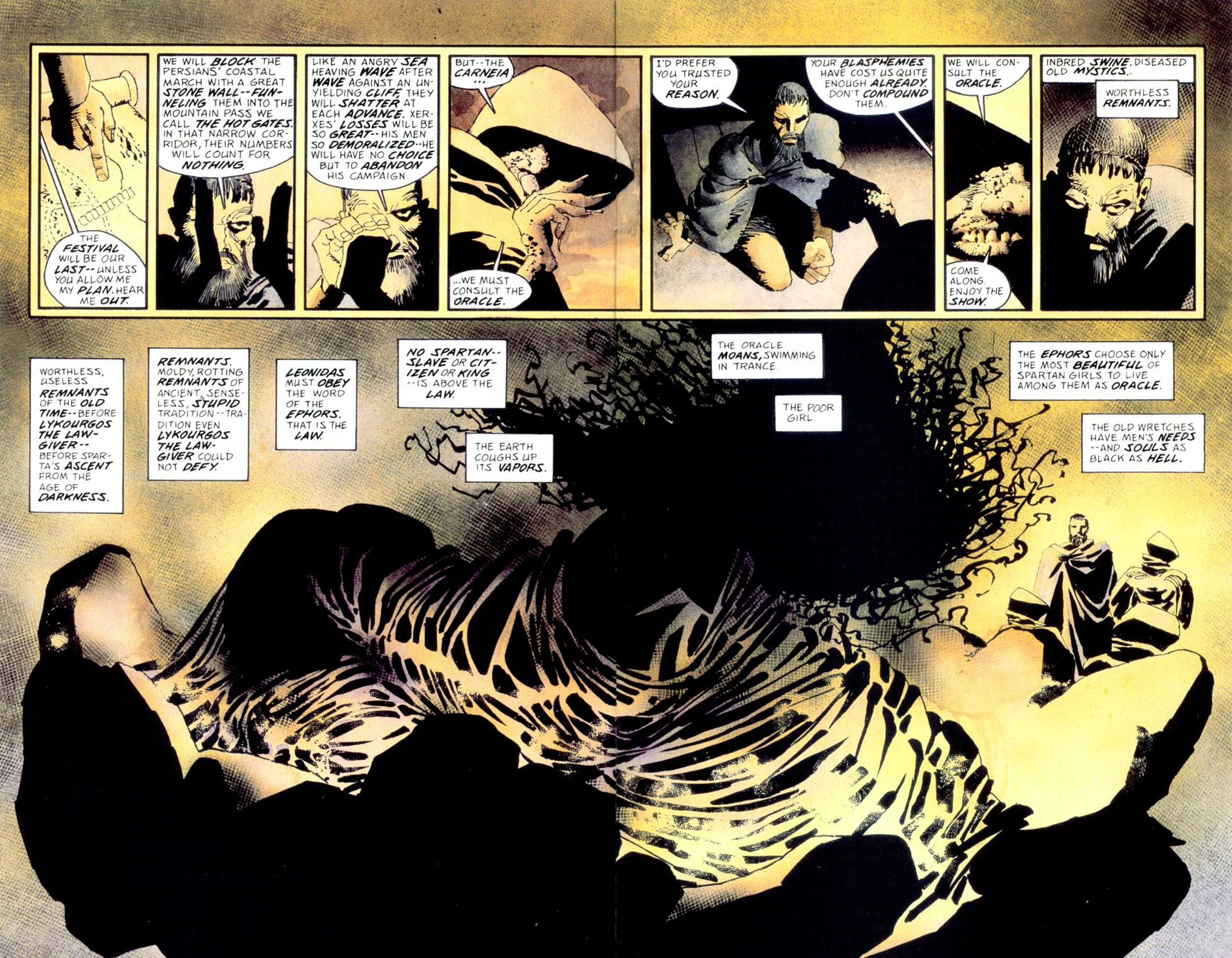
DUTY

NO. NO SLEEP TONIGHT. NOT FOR THE KING.
TOO RESTLESS. EAGER AS A YOUTH--EAGER AS A BEARDLESS, WET-NOSED CADET--FOR BATTLE.
BATTLE. STILL MILES AND DAYS DISTANT.
RESTLESS. FRUSTRATED. ALL HIS FIFTY YEARS HAVE BEEN A STRAIGHT ROAD TO THIS ONE GLEAMING MOMENT OF DESTINY--THIS ONE RADIANT CLASH OF SHIELD AND SPEAR AND SWORD AND BONE AND FLESH AND BLOOD.
STILL DAYS AWAY.
AND THOUGH HE LEADS HIS PRECIOUS THREE HUNDRED TO CERTAIN DEATH--HIS ONLY REGRET IS THAT HE HAS SO FEW TO SACRIFICE.
EVERY SPARTAN--MAN OR WOMAN--SHOULD SHARE IN THIS GLORY. AND IN THE VICTORY THAT WOULD'VE BEEN SECURED, HAD NOT KING LEONIDAS BEEN SO ROUNDLY THWARTED.
THWARTED--BY A FOE WHO SQUATS AMONG THE SUMMER CLOUDS, AS ROUND AND FAT AS SOME GLUTTONOUS ATHENIAN.

REMEMBER.
TWO WEEKS AGO.
ABOVE SPARTA.
A HARD CLIMB.

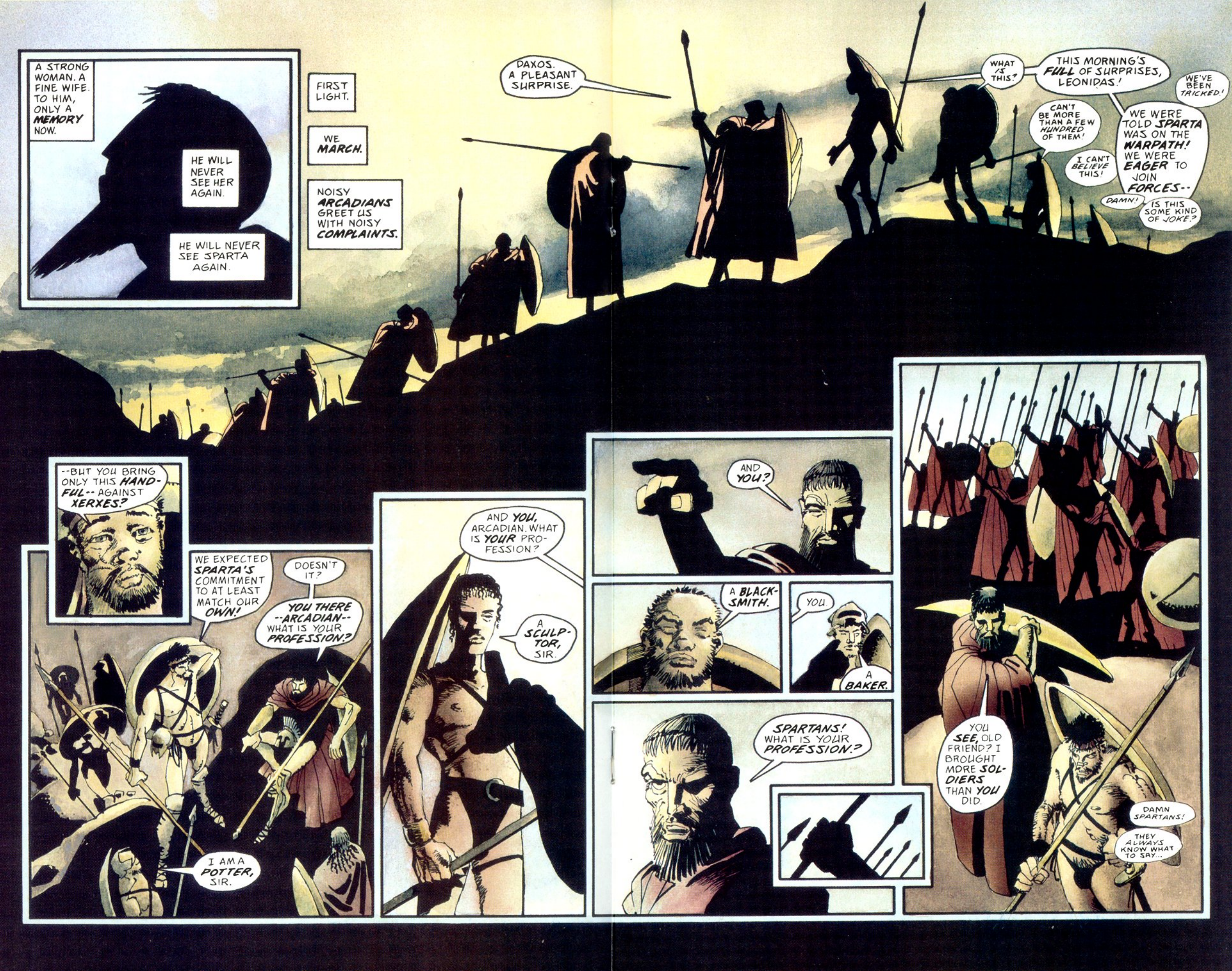

WELCOME, LEONIDAS. WE HAVE BEEN EXPECTING YOU.
I TRUST YOU DIDN'T COME EMPTY-HANDED?
KANK
KLINK
IT LOOKS HEAVY. YOU CARRY IT.
COME ALONG MY BROTHERS ARE WAITING.
THE EPHORS. PRIESTS TO THE OLD GODS.
INBRED SWINE WHOM EVEN A KING MUST BRIBE--AND BEG.

KING XERXES IS ON THE MARCH. THE FATE OF ALL GREECE HANGS IN THE BALANCE.
FIRST THINGS FIRST, LEONIDAS.
YOU MUSTN'T INSULT THE GODS.
KLINK KLANK
PROCEED.
FIRST THINGS FIRST.
THERE'S NEVER BEEN A HOLY MAN WHO LACKED THE LOVE FOR GOLD.
THE PERSIANS CLAIM THEIR FORCES NUMBER IN THE MILLIONS. SURELY THEY EXAGGERATE--BUT THERE'S NO QUESTION THAT WE WILL FACE THE MOST MASSIVE ARMY EVER ASSEMBLED.
WE WILL USE OUR SUPERIOR FIGHTING SKILL --AND THE TERRAIN OF GREECE HERSELF--TO DESTROY THEM. WE WILL MARCH NORTH. TO THE COAST.
IT IS AUGUST. THE FULL MOON APPROACHES.
THE CARNEIA. THE SACRED FESTIVAL OF THE CARNEIA.
SPARTA WAGES NO WAR AT THE TIME OF THE CARNEIA.


THE FESTIVAL WILL BE OUR LAST-- UNLESS YOU ALLOW ME MY PLAN. HEAR ME OUT.
WE WILL BLOCK THE PERSIANS' COASTAL MARCH WITH A GREAT STONE WALL--FUNNELING THEM INTO THE MOUNTAIN PASS WE CALL THE HOT GATES. IN THAT NARROW CORRIDOR, THEIR NUMBERS WILL COUNT FOR NOTHING.
LIKE AN ANGRY SEA HEAVING WAVE AFTER WAVE AGAINST AN UNYIELDING CLIFF, THEY WILL SHATTER AT EACH ADVANCE. XERXES' LOSSES WILL BE SO GREAT--HIS MEN SO DEMORALIZED--HE WILL HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO ABANDON HIS CAMPAIGN.
BUT--THE CARNEIA...
...WE MUST CONSULT THE ORACLE.
I'D PREFER YOU TRUSTED YOUR REASON.
YOUR BLASPHEMIES HAVE COST US QUITE ENOUGH ALREADY. DON'T COMPOUND THEM.
WE WILL CONSULT THE ORACLE.
COME ALONG. ENJOY THE SHOW.
INBRED SWINE. DISEASED OLD MYSTICS.
WORTHLESS REMNANTS.
WORTHLESS, USELESS REMNANTS OF THE OLD TIME--BEFORE LYKOURGOS THE LAW-GIVER--BEFORE SPARTA'S ASCENT FROM THE AGE OF DARKNESS.
REMNANTS. MOLDY, ROTTING REMNANTS OF ANCIENT, SENSELESS, STUPID TRADITION--TRADITION EVEN LYKOURGOS THE LAW-GIVER COULD NOT DEFY.
LEONIDAS MUST OBEY THE WORD OF THE EPHORS. THAT IS THE LAW.
NO SPARTAN--SLAVE OR CITIZEN OR KING--IS ABOVE THE LAW.
THE EARTH COUGHS UP ITS VAPORS.
THE ORACLE MOANS, SWIMMING IN TRANCE.
THE POOR GIRL.
THE EPHORS CHOOSE ONLY THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF SPARTAN GIRLS TO LIVE AMONG THEM AS ORACLE.
THE OLD WRETCHES HAVE MEN'S NEEDS--AND SOULS AS BLACK AS HELL.

PRAY TO THE WINDS. SPARTA WILL FALL. ALL GREECE WILL FALL. TRUST NOT IN MEN. HONOR THE OLD GODS. HONOR THE CARNEIA.
THE CLIMB DOWN. IT'S HARDER.
POMPOUS, INBRED SWINE.
WORTHLESS.
DISEASED.
ROTTEN.
CORRUPT.
KLANK KLINK KLANK
GREAT XERXES GIVES HIS THANKS, WISE MEN.
WHEN SPARTA BURNS-- YOU WILL BATHE IN GOLD. FRESH ORACLES WILL BE DELIVERED TO YOU--DAILY--FROM EVERY CORNER OF THE EMPIRE.

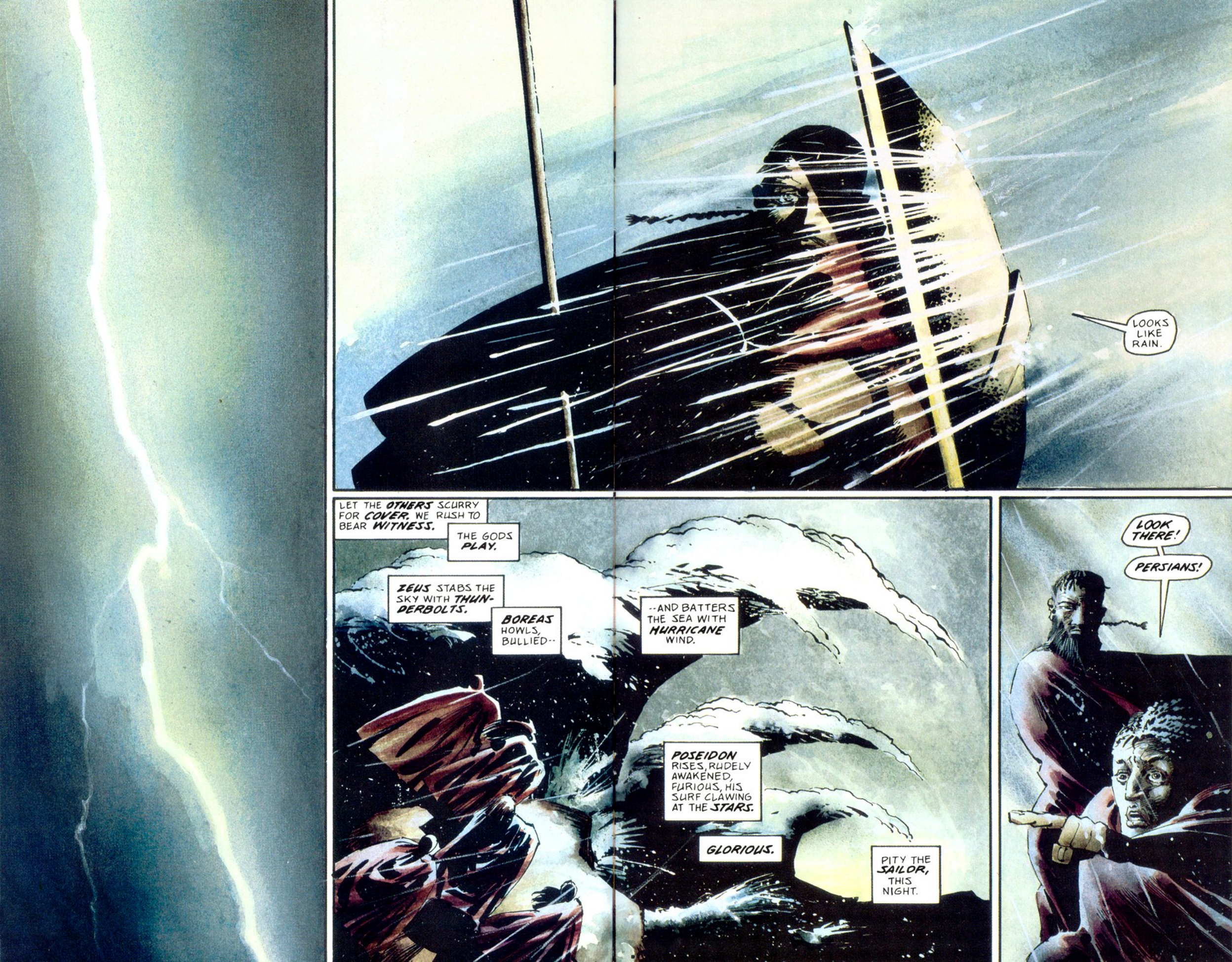
SPARTA. THE NEXT MORNING.
LEONIDAS HAS BARELY STRAPPED UP HIS SANDALS WHEN THE COUNCIL IS UPON HIM, VOICES HUSHED:
GOOD KING. THE ORACLE HAS SPOKEN. THE EPHORS HAVE SPOKEN. THERE MUST BE NO MARCH.
THE LAW, MY LORD. THE SPARTAN ARMY MUST NOT GO TO WAR.
NOR SHALL IT. YOU WORRY OVER NOTHING. I'VE ISSUED NO ORDERS. I'M JUST STRETCHING MY LEGS. TAKING A WALK.
AND I INSIST YOU TAKE YOUR ENTIRE BODYGUARD WITH YOU, DEAR HUSBAND. ALL THREE HUNDRED. CALL ME PROTECTIVE.
WE'D NEVER DOUBT YOUR WORD, LEONIDAS. BUT PERMIT ME TO ASK-- WHERE IS IT YOU INTEND TO WALK?
HM. GOOD QUESTION...
...I HADN'T GIVEN IT MUCH THOUGHT. BUT NOW THAT YOU ASK--I SUPPOSE I'LL HEAD NORTH.
AK!
"NORTH," HE SAYS!
NORTH. THE HOT GATES. THIS EXPLAINS YOUR ENTHUSIASM LAST NIGHT.
YES.
WHAT DO WE DO?
WHAT CAN WE DO?
SPARTA NEEDS SONS.
SPARTAN!
YES, MY LADY?
COME BACK WITH YOUR SHIELD--OR ON IT.
YES, MY LADY.
"GOODBYE, MY LOVE." HE DOESN'T SAY IT. THERE IS NO ROOM FOR SOFTNESS. NOT IN SPARTA. NO PLACE FOR WEAKNESS.
ONLY THE HARD AND STRONG MAY CALL THEMSELVES SPARTANS.
ONLY THE HARD.
ONLY THE STRONG.


A STRONG WOMAN. A FINE WIFE. TO HIM, ONLY A MEMORY NOW.
HE WILL NEVER SEE HER AGAIN.
HE WILL NEVER SEE SPARTA AGAIN.
FIRST LIGHT.
WE MARCH.
NOISY ARCADIANS GREET US WITH NOISY COMPLAINTS.
DAXOS. A PLEASANT SURPRISE.
WHAT IS THIS?
THIS MORNING'S FULL OF SURPRISES, LEONIDAS!
WE'VE BEEN TRICKED!
CAN'T BE MORE THAN A FEW HUNDRED OF THEM!
WE WERE TOLD SPARTA WAS ON THE WARPATH! WE WERE EAGER TO JOIN FORCES--
I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS!
DAMN!
IS THIS SOME KIND OF JOKE?
--BUT YOU BRING ONLY THIS HANDFUL-- AGAINST XERXES?
WE EXPECTED SPARTA'S COMMITMENT TO AT LEAST MATCH OUR OWN!
DOESN'T IT?
YOU THERE --ARCADIAN-- WHAT IS YOUR PROFESSION?
I AM A POTTER, SIR.
AND YOU, ARCADIAN. WHAT IS YOUR PROFESSION?
A SCULPTOR, SIR.
AND YOU?
A BLACKSMITH.
YOU.
A BAKER.
SPARTANS! WHAT IS YOUR PROFESSION?
YOU SEE, OLD FRIEND? I BROUGHT MORE SOLDIERS THAN YOU DID.
DAMN SPARTANS!
THEY ALWAYS KNOW WHAT TO SAY...

FROM TEGEA AND MANTINEA THEY COME--FROM THESPIAE AND THEBES AND OPUS AND PHOCIS AND MALIS. SOME BY THE DOZENS. SOME BY THE HUNDREDS. CITIZEN-SOLDIERS. FREED SLAVES. BRAVE GREEKS ALL.
BRAVE AMATEURS. THEY JABBER. THEY BRAG. THEY BICKER. THEY JOKE. THEY EVEN LAUGH OUT LOUD.
SEVEN THOUSAND STRONG--
--WE MARCH.

INTO HELL'S MOUTH--
--WE MARCH.

THE
HOT
GATES


LOOKS LIKE RAIN.
LET THE OTHERS SCURRY FOR COVER. WE RUSH TO BEAR WITNESS.
THE GODS PLAY.
ZEUS STABS THE SKY WITH THUNDERBOLTS.
BOREAS HOWLS, BULLIED--
--AND BATTERS THE SEA WITH HURRICANE WIND.
POSEIDON RISES, RUDELY AWAKENED, FURIOUS, HIS SURF CLAWING AT THE STARS.
GLORIOUS.
PITY THE SAILOR, THIS NIGHT.
LOOK THERE!
PERSIANS!

JUBILATION.
LAUGHTER AND SONGS AND PRAISE FOR THE GODS THAT WILL CONTINUE TILL THE NEXT DAY'S DAWN.
ONLY ONE AMONG US KEEPS HIS SPARTAN RESERVE.
ONLY HE.
ONLY THE KING.
HIS THOUGHTS ARE BITTERSWEET:
THE FOOLS. THE DEAR YOUNG FOOLS.
THEY ACTUALLY THINK WE HAVE A CHANCE.

SLINGS & ARROWS

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If you're lucky enough to meet with success in the comics field, other folks who'd like to show their works to your readership often ask for your public endorsement. Since we're a pretty deadline-plagued bunch, this can be a lot to ask. In fact, it can be a real pain in the butt.

I, of course, am far too self-effacing and polite a guy to even think of making that kind of imposition on my colleagues . . .

Joe Kubert
Dover, NJ

You've reached a higher level, another plateau with *300*. The effort you put into research, backgrounds, and reference is apparent. The storytelling is clear, effective, and dramatic. The pacing and flow work well.

However, your most outstanding accomplishment, to me, is the immediacy of action you were able to create. Like a combat artist drawing the scenes as they occur. It allows me, the reader, to be a witness alongside you.

But it's the combination of your use of black and color where your achievement really shines. The color enhances texture and depth without overpowering. You and Lynn did good.

Adam and Andy loved it, too.

Maggie Thompson
Comics Buyer's Guide
Iola, WI

When the announcement came that a film was being made about the sinking of *Titanic*, a common reaction was a mocking rejection of the idea that the public would take to the project. "Hey, we *know* how it's going to end!" said many. "Who'll pay to see a movie about something so depressing?"

Who, indeed?

The point, of course, is that what's important about a work of art is how it's put together: How compelling is the creator's vision? How well does the creator know the subject? Does the creator have anything at all to say? Is the work of art involving? Does it grip the viewer and refuse to let go until the work is complete? If it's done right, audiences *will* respond — and tell their friends.

Answering the above in sequence, regarding Frank Miller's work on *300*, as seen in photocopies of #1-4 (of 5 total): Very. Thoroughly. You bet. You bet. You bet.

Or, paraphrasing Goethe, "What was the creator trying to do? How well did the creator succeed? Was it worth doing?"

Answering him (but only in part; answering in full would take a bunch of pages): Tell a riveting anecdote from history so as to move a modern audience. Completely. You bet.

But it's not just one creator who's involved. Frank Miller immersed himself in research and combined his modern view with ancient motivations to grip readers with bold layouts, confident strokes, convincing scripting, and powerful storytelling. And from color photocopies provided — it's clear that Lynn Varley knows just what to do to take Miller's work to an even more dynamic level.

300 is comics storytelling at its best. This one should be kept in print permanently.

Walter Simonson
Suffern, NY

One of the things I love most about Frank's work is his ability to reinvent himself from time to time. From *Daredevil* to *Ronin* to *Dark Knight* to *Sin City*, he's traveled a long distance through four titles. And yet each of those comics represents Frank's gift for creating a uniquely realized world within the frame of his stories. It doesn't hurt that Frank is one of the best visual storytellers presently working in comics, either. And, usually, where Frank goes, a lot of others tend to follow.

Which is why I can't wait for *300* to start coming out.

The tale of the 300 Spartans is a story close to Frank's heart, one that he's wanted to tell for a long time. And I think the story of Leonidas and his boys is a hell of an adventure that deserves the ripping storytelling Frank's given it.

I must add that Lynn Varley's painting adds a wonderful dimension to Frank's work. When I initially saw some of the pages from *300*, they were black-and-white faxes. And, as *Sin City* has demonstrated, Frank's work in black-and-white is so powerful that I wondered a little if the book would actually benefit from color or if the color would somehow soften or dilute the imagery. Of course, I should have had more faith in Lynn, but, hey, I'm only human! Now that I've seen the first issue in color, I can't wait to see the rest! The painting has strengthened a wonderful evocation of an ancient time and place, mixed together as it must be for modern sensibilities.

But I must confess that I think my favorite part of the whole exercise has been my anticipation of the issues actually coming out. Over the last few months, I've spoken to a few friends of mine in the retail end of comics, as well as to the occasional comics fan. And most of them had no idea who Leonidas was, who the 300 were, or what the story of Thermopylae was about. So, while there was interest, and even expectation, in Frank's new project, because it was Frank, there was only a sort of dulled comprehension that this was going to be some sort of historical comic, rather than the latest exciting intercompany crossover between

the Purple Panty-Waist and Zipperman.

I think *300*'s going to blow the brain boxes off the shoulders of a lot of readers who won't be at all ready for what they're going to find when they open up the cover of the first issue.

I think Frank's reinvented himself again. And I think it would be awfully cool if his reinvention revitalized an entire genre that's virtually disappeared from comics!

Jeff Smith
Cartoon Books
Columbus, OH

Thanks for letting me see the first two installments of *300*. They're fantastic! A little Frank Miller, a little Lynn Varley, and 300 violent, desperate men, armed only with steel and bone against impossible odds — what more could you ask for?

This is why I read comics! Pacing, tight plot, a sense of purpose, and the perfect release of information to the reader . . . something rare in any medium. And it's obvious you did your research. Everything from the sandals and hairstyles to the intrigue of the local politics makes it all credible. But the shot that really put me into the story was an overhead view of the soldiers marching through the rough, wild grass. It is clear that you have walked the stone- and grass-covered hills of Sparta yourself and seen what the soldiers would have seen.

On top of all this, you're doing all double-page spreads?! You go, boy. Use your canvas!

As I said, this is why I read comics. And these days, there are precious few reasons why anyone should. You, Frank, are one of the reasons I still do.

Jill Thompson
Chicago, IL

Thank you for sending me the advance copies of Frank Miller's forthcoming project, *300*! It was more than wonderful.

I thoroughly enjoyed being transported to the moments that may have led up to the Greco-Persian War. I've always enjoyed fiction based on historical events, whether it be in book or film, and I'm glad to see it in my favorite medium. It's heartening to see someone craft a tale in comics with such an unexpected subject matter (I can't wait until Eric Shanower finishes his tale of the Trojan War, either!). Comics should be used to tell all manner of stories! Projects like these remind us what a limitless medium we work in! We just have to make use of it!

The stark and graphic storytelling expertly conveys the powerful emotions of the ancient drama — but what else would you expect from Frank Miller? When he tackles a subject, it tackles you back! I'm anxiously awaiting the rest of the story so I can read it without interruption!

If this is the beginning of a new series of historical dramas from Frank Miller, I'll be along for the ride on the timeline!

Dave Gibbons
St. Albans, England

We all know Frank has a way with a story, but usually a crime or fantasy one. So to find him applying his skills to ancient history comes completely from left field.

What I find amazing is how it all seems so fresh: authentic in every respect as far as I can tell, but with all the immediacy and rawness of a modern war story. The unexpected turns and juxtapositions that characterize Frank's work are all here, as well as the black humor and the bloodshed that he deploys so well. I can't imagine anyone who was enthralled by *Dark Knight* or *Sin City* being disappointed.

And we all know Frank has a way with drawing, but, as he seems to do with each succeeding piece, he's evolved into new areas yet again with *300*. The stark chiaroscuro of *Sin City* has merged with the sensitive line of *Ronin* to produce an effect which is both graphically stunning and entirely appropriate to the subject matter.

The historical detail and setting are completely convincing, and seldom have I seen research so well assimilated and interpreted. As with the story, Frank seems completely in control of his material.

At this writing, I've seen very little of Lynn's coloring, but that little leaves me no doubt that her contribution will be as stunning as her finishes on *Dark Knight*; the sense of place and atmosphere here jumps from the pages.

I can't conclude without mentioning that the combination of Frank's bold drawing and Lynn's evocative palette puts me in mind of the work of the late Frank Bellamy, whose full-color work inspired many a budding English comics artist, me included. Curiously enough, he once worked on a character called "Heros The Spartan" who, confusingly enough, was a Roman soldier based in pre-Christian Britain.

I know that Frank Miller is as likely to have plagiarized Frank Bellamy's first name as he is his work, and he'll know that I only mean it as the highest compliment to say *300* gives me the same kind of thrill that the other Frank's did, way back when.

Mimi Carroll
Night Flight
Salt Lake City, UT

As you know, I've never been much of a kiss-ass, so I'm sure you'll forgive me if my praise is a little unpolished. Regarding *300*, Salt Lake City has responded with great enthusiasm. To my knowledge, as I write this at least two university professors and one high school teacher eagerly await the release of *300*, and with the same eager elation plan on subjecting their students to it. Did you ever think your work might be "mandatory" reading for the overworked student? Next time you're in Salt Lake, expect an invitation to lecture, too.

With the *300* project, you've proven you can deliver the violence, inhumanity, and crime of centuries ago to today's young minds. It brings a smile to my face just thinking about it. Our regular Night Flight crowd greedily awaits *300* as well, so don't think you've just reached academic minds with this, either. At times, as I looked at the men march, I wanted to burst into *Monty Python*'s "Lumberjack" song. These truly were manly men doing manly things. I guess I'm having too much fun, but I would be disappointed if your work were not fun.

All we usually hear about this period in time is the Spartans' attempt to conquer Troy, as outlined in Homer's *Iliad*. It's nice to have another story without a Trojan Horse or that Helen chick.

Varley's colors bring both a vibrancy and texture to this historical time period. Her colors are a complement to your style.

Thanks for the fun, Frank!

Bob Schreck
Oni Press
Portland, OR

What a joy it is to be alive and so privileged as to be allowed to enjoy your latest effort, months

before its release on the racks. Speaking as your former marketing director, editor, and your current occasional other publisher, I have never been more impressed with your masterful grasp of the medium. This work is by far the most dangerous, take-no-prisoners, full-throttle stick of dynamite I've ever had the pleasure of reading. As your fan, I couldn't have asked for a better series to sink my teeth into. Thank you.

What's really annoying about this is that you continue to make it look easier every time you set sail. From the script and visual pacing to the brush strokes and incredible, thoughtful colors, *300* is an exquisite ballet of masterful storytelling. If you can carry on the march, I know that I, and hordes of others, will fall into rank and follow you two wherever your four feet take us.

I guess what I'm trying to say is: "You two totally rip!"

Mike Mignola
Portland, OR

Naked guys with big spears and big red capes. They aren't superheroes really. They aren't jumping over buildings or smashing planets or shooting beams out of their heads. So far, at least, they're just marching, but there is more drama and power in those guys just walking around than in any number of today's "superhero" comics. I know there are a lot of different influences at work here, but behind them all is *Kirby*, naked as a Spartan, chompin' on a cigar, turning a big iron crank. That's a good thing!

. . . and if there's anything worse than begging fellow professionals to write nice things about your work, that would have to be running nakedly *quid pro quo* recommendations for theirs . . .

— FM

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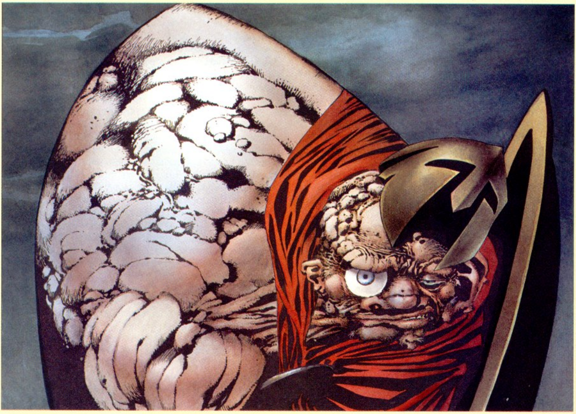
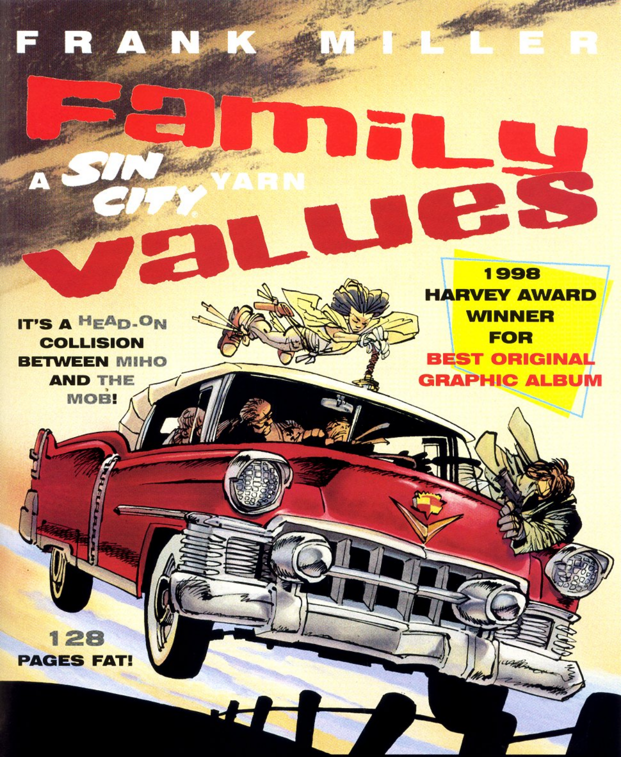
GLORY





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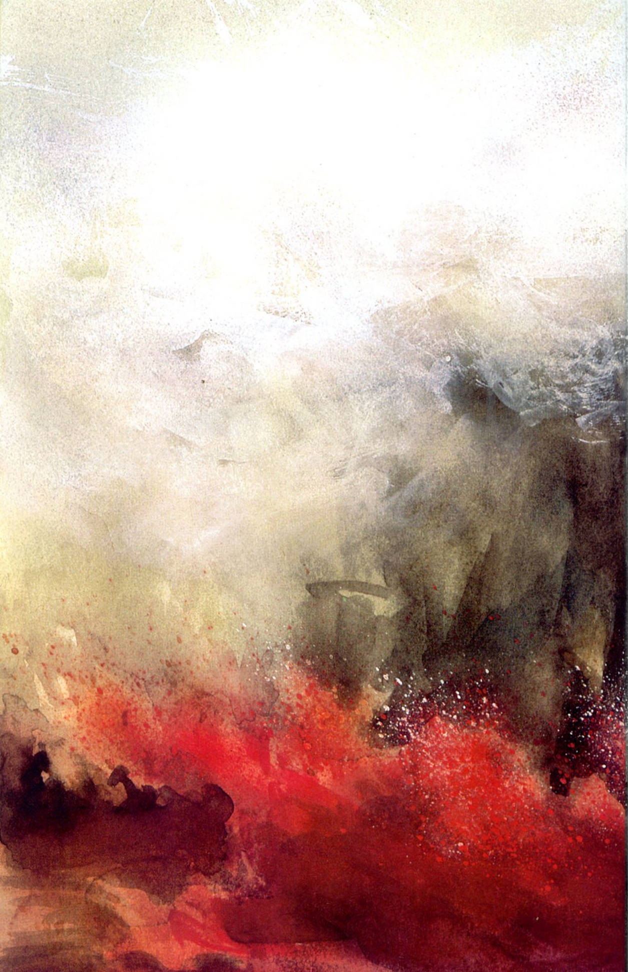

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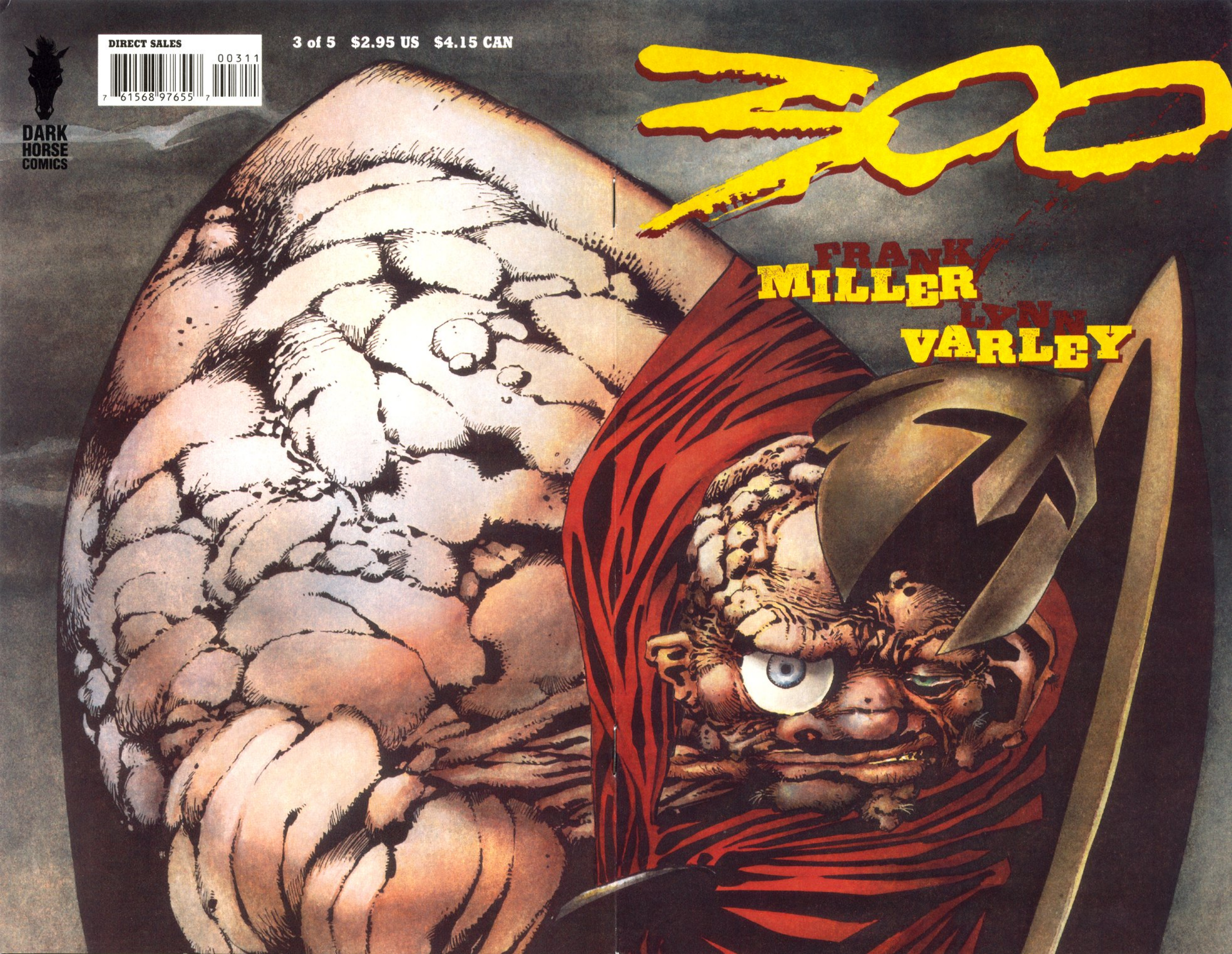
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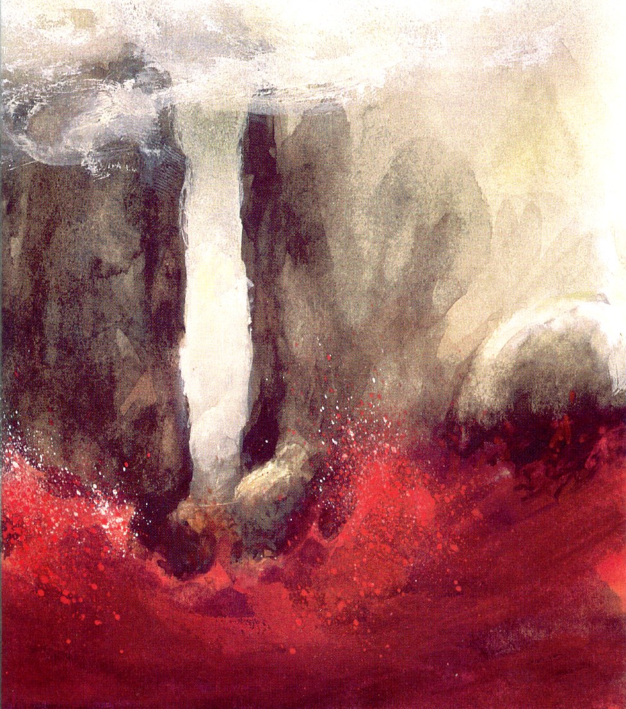
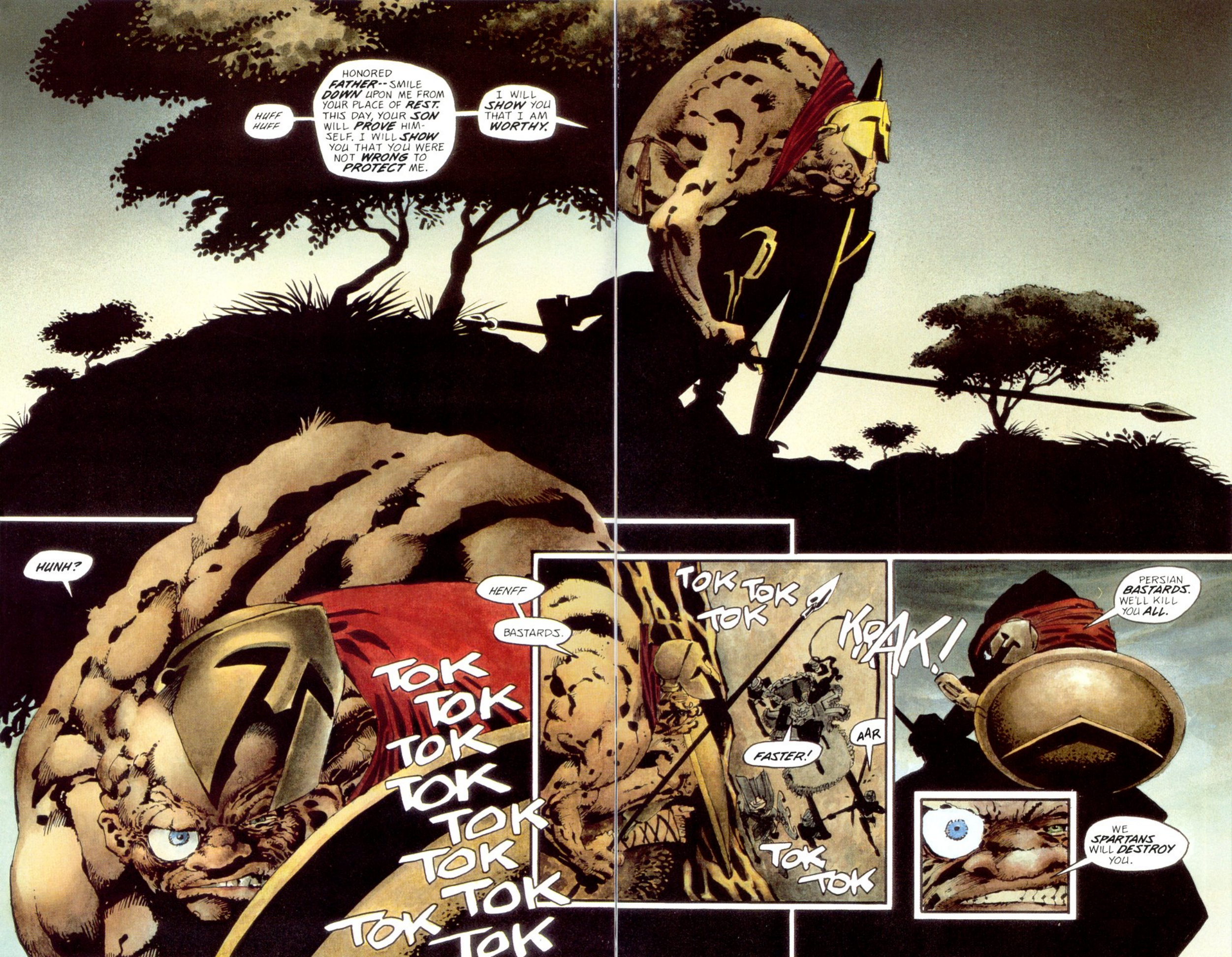
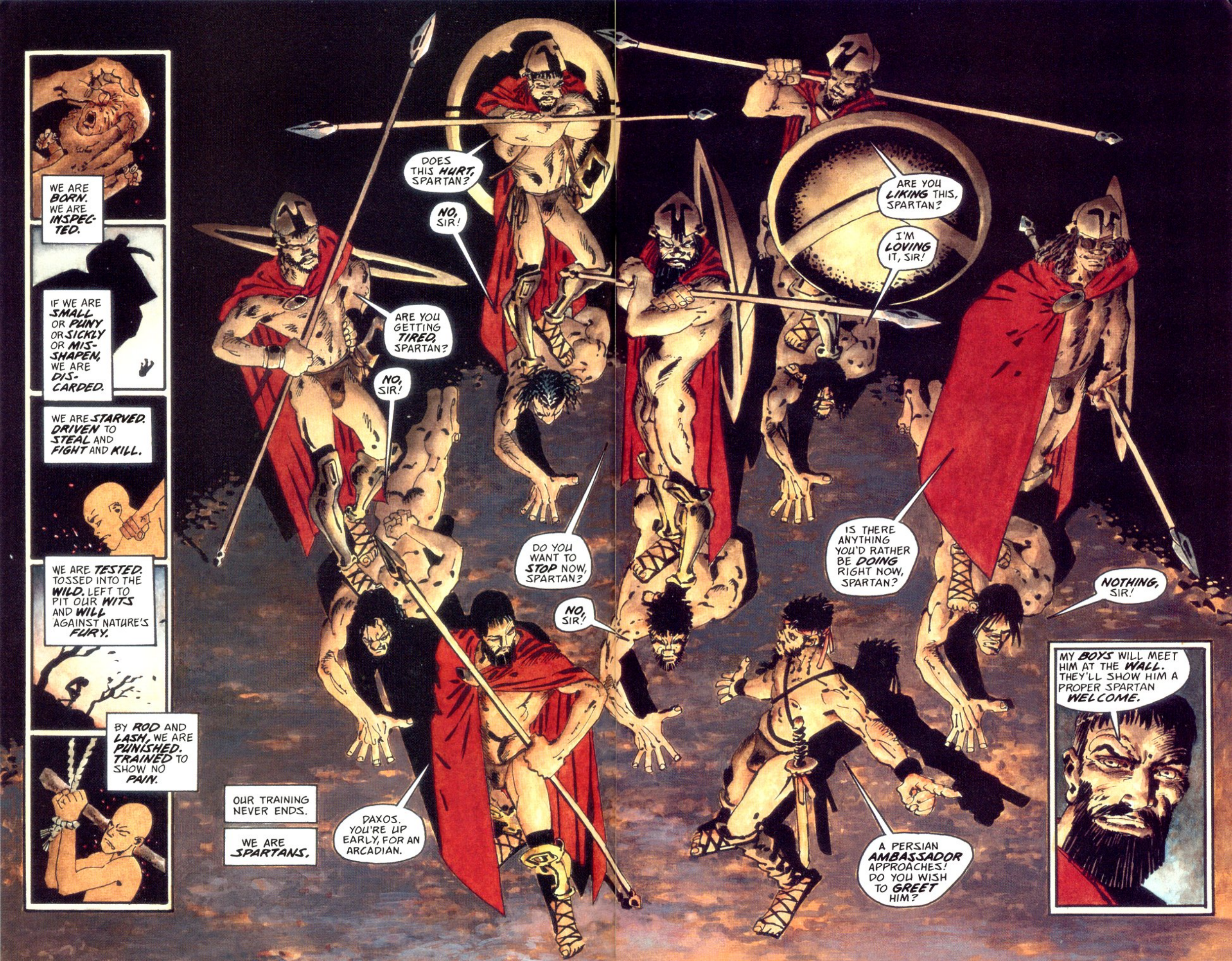
CHAPTER THREE:

GLORY




HUFF HUFF
HONORED FATHER--SMILE DOWN UPON ME FROM YOUR PLACE OF REST. THIS DAY, YOUR SON WILL PROVE HIMSELF. I WILL SHOW YOU THAT YOU WERE NOT WRONG TO PROTECT ME.
I WILL SHOW YOU THAT I AM WORTHY.
HUNH?
TOK TOK TOK TOK TOK TOK TOK TOK TOK
HENFF
BASTARDS.
TOK TOK TOK
KRAAK!
FASTER!
AAR
TOK TOK
PERSIAN BASTARDS. WE'LL KILL YOU ALL.
WE SPARTANS WILL DESTROY YOU.

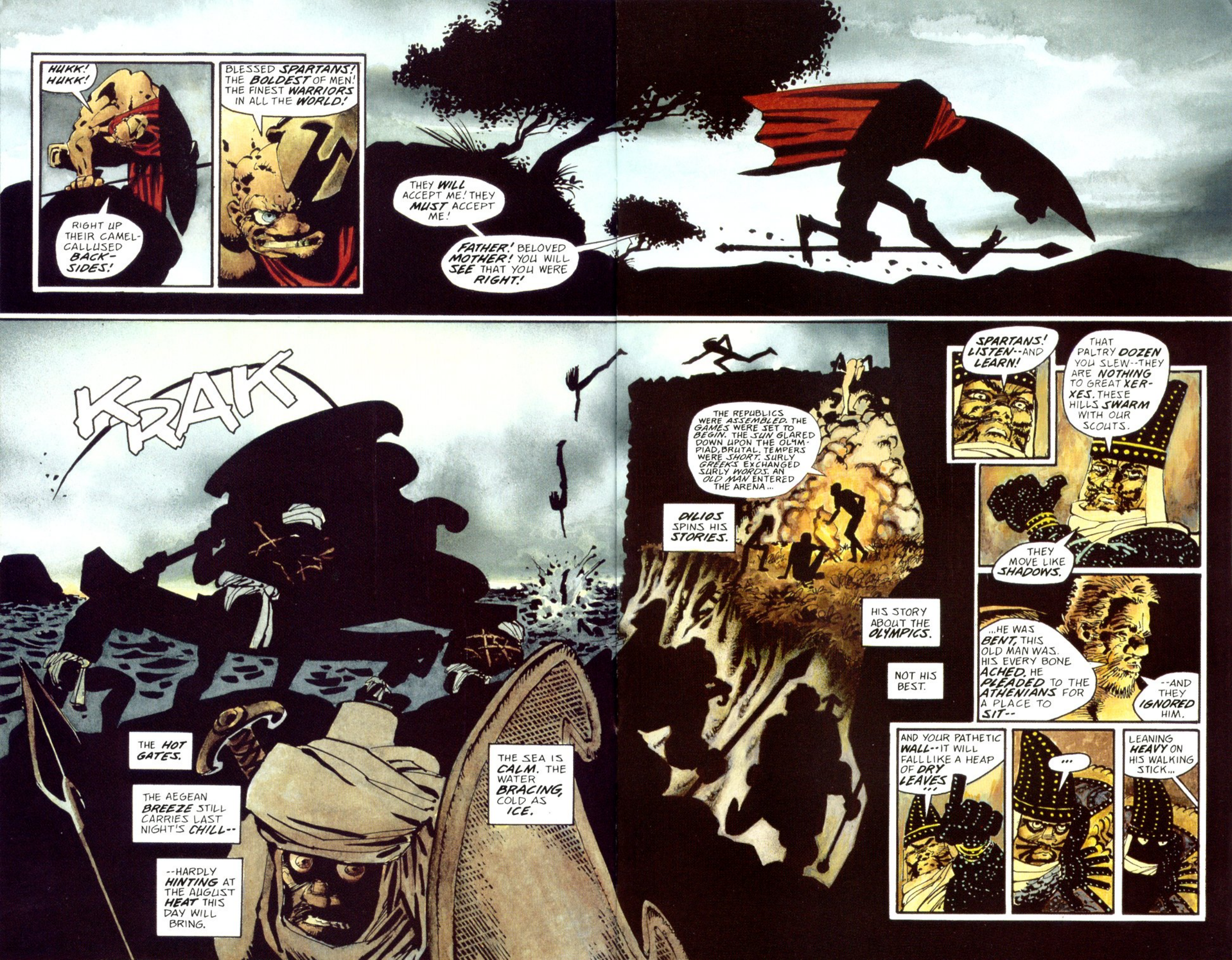

WE ARE BORN. WE ARE INSPECTED.
IF WE ARE SMALL OR PUNY OR SICKLY OR MISSHAPEN, WE ARE DISCARDED.
WE ARE STARVED. DRIVEN TO STEAL AND FIGHT AND KILL.
WE ARE TESTED. TOSSED INTO THE WILD. LEFT TO PIT OUR WITS AND WILL AGAINST NATURE'S FURY.
BY ROD AND LASH, WE ARE PUNISHED. TRAINED TO SHOW NO PAIN.
OUR TRAINING NEVER ENDS.
WE ARE SPARTANS.
ARE YOU GETTING TIRED, SPARTAN?
NO, SIR!
DOES THIS HURT, SPARTAN?
NO, SIR!
DO YOU WANT TO STOP NOW, SPARTAN?
NO, SIR!
ARE YOU LIKING THIS, SPARTAN?
I'M LOVING IT, SIR!
IS THERE ANYTHING YOU'D RATHER BE DOING RIGHT NOW, SPARTAN?
NOTHING, SIR!
DAXOS. YOU'RE UP EARLY, FOR AN ARCADIAN.
A PERSIAN AMBASSADOR APPROACHES! DO YOU WISH TO GREET HIM?
MY BOYS WILL MEET HIM AT THE WALL. THEY'LL SHOW HIM A PROPER SPARTAN WELCOME.

TOK
TOK
TOK
FASTER!
PERHAPS KING **XERXES** SENT HIS **AMBASSADOR** TO NEGOTIATE OUR **SURRENDER**.
KRAK!
GAA
TOK TOK
TOK TOK

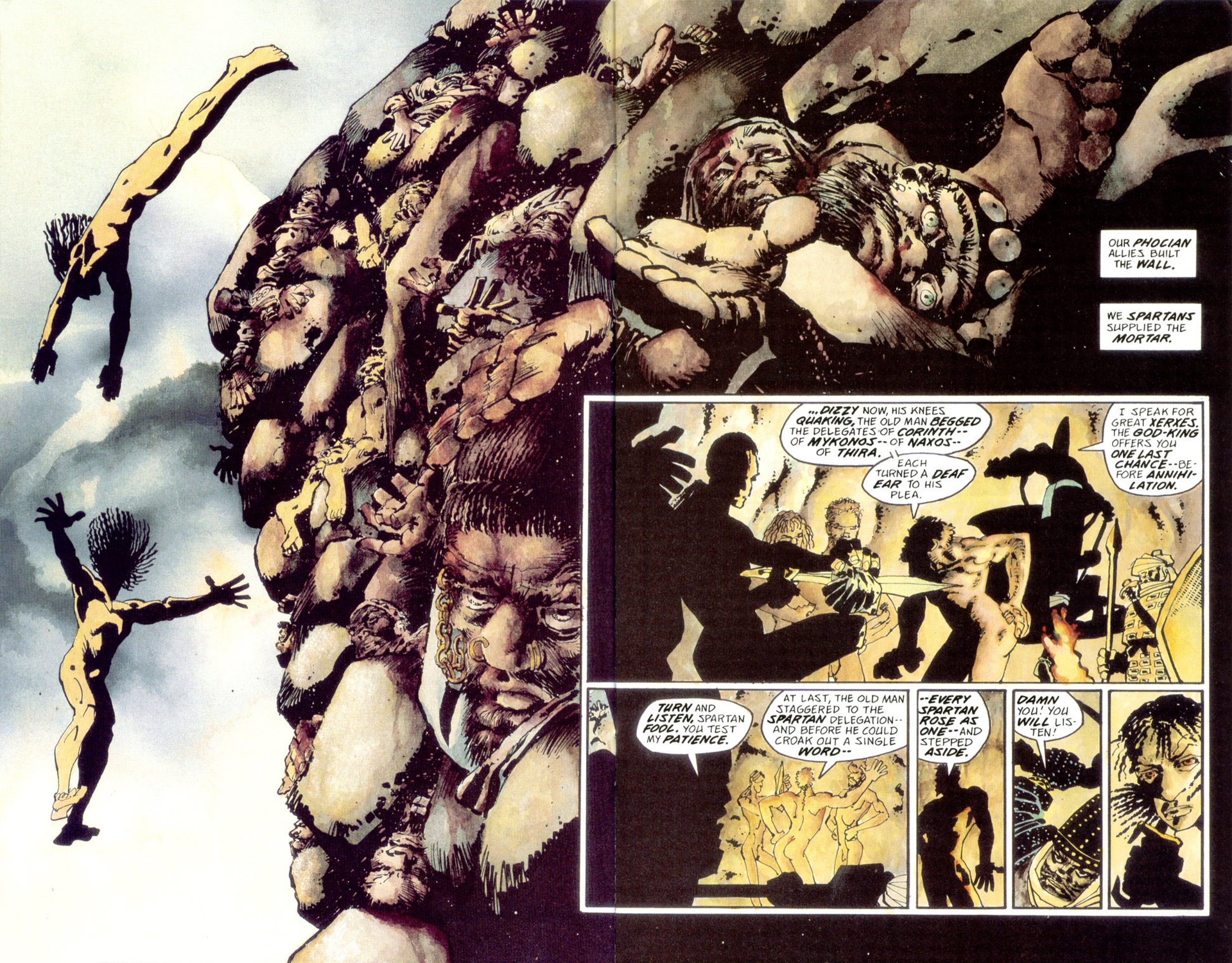
KRAK!
YARR
HNH?
...
...FIENDS...
OR PERHAPS HE WONDERS WHY HE HASN'T HEARD FROM HIS **SCOUTS**.

A SPARTAN WELCOME.

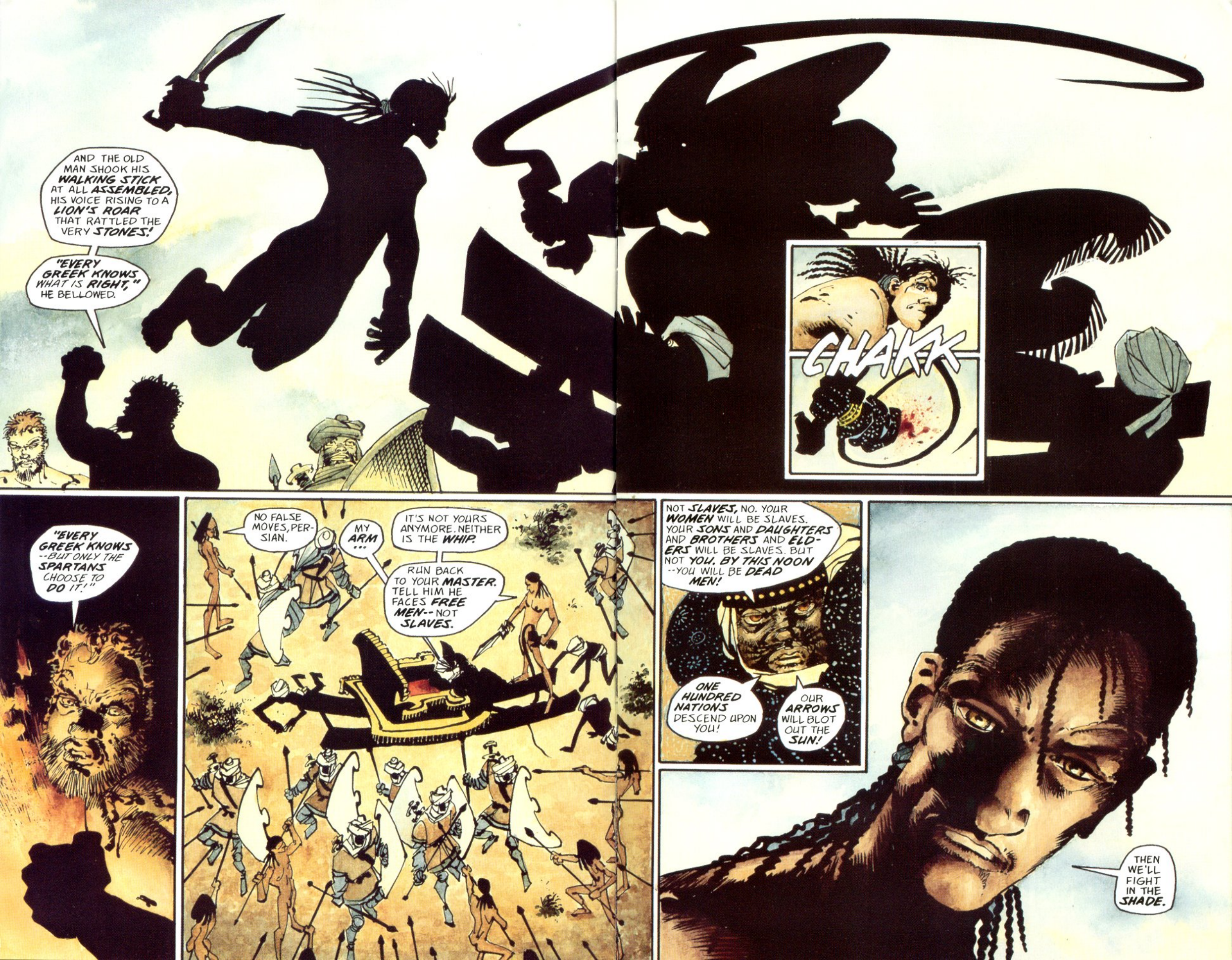
FORWARD.
IT'S TRUE. WHAT THEY SAY.
THESE SPARTANS. THEY ARE DEMONS.
KRAK
GAA
FORWARD!
THEIR STEP SLOWER--
--THEIR BREATH QUICKER--
--THEIR FINGERS GRIPPED MORE TIGHTLY ABOUT THEIR SPEARS--
--THE SLAVES OF XERXES ADVANCE.

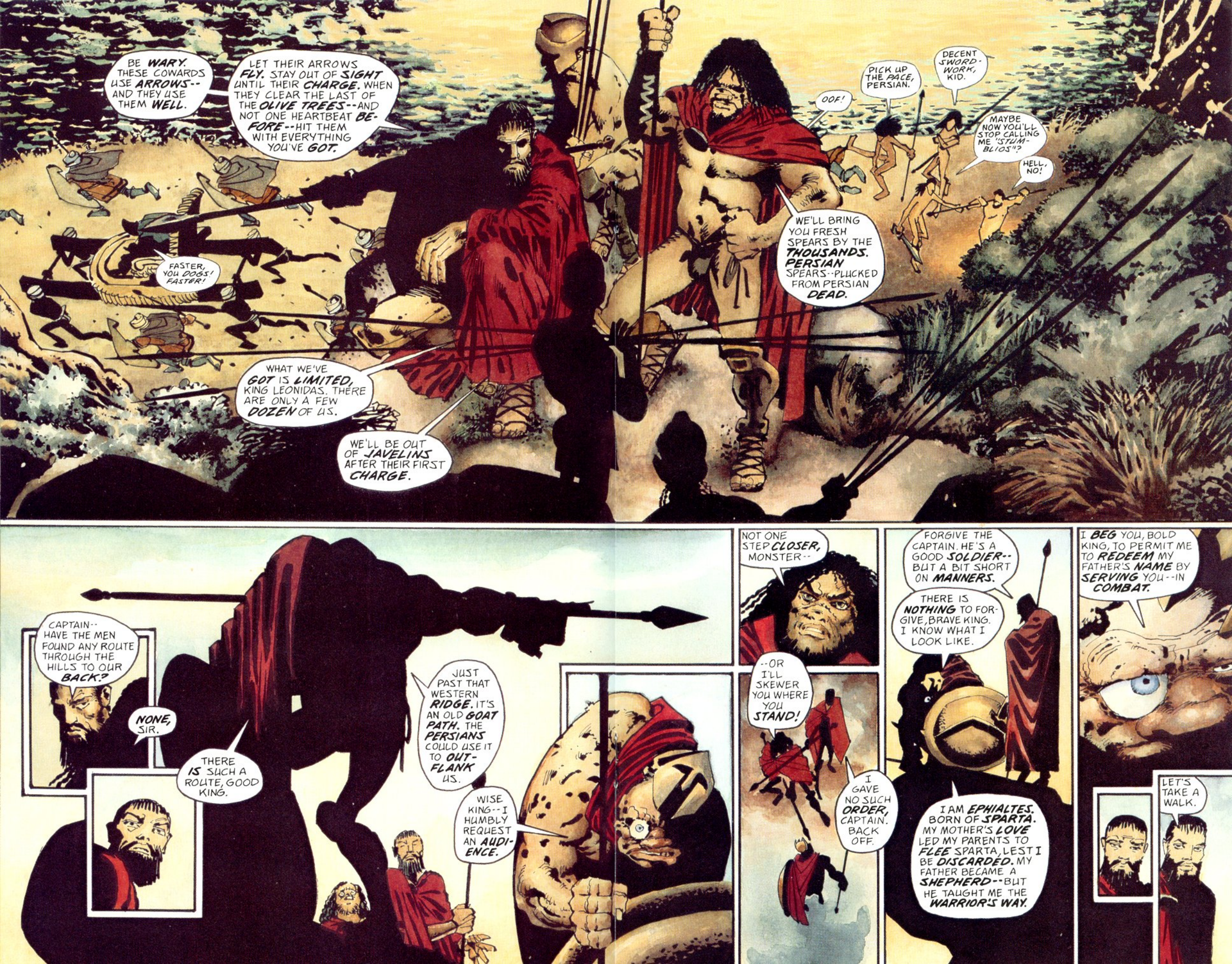


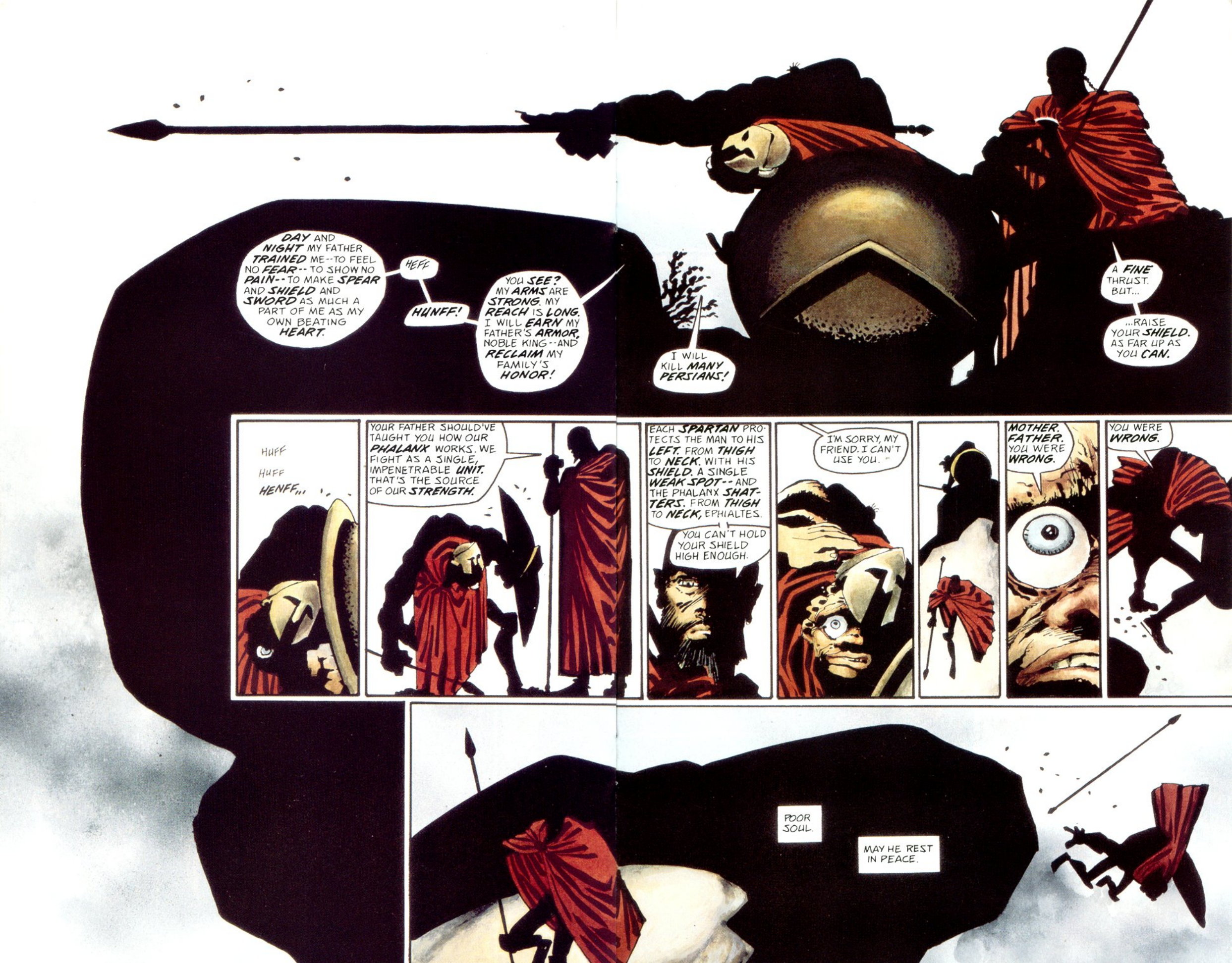
HUKK! HUKK!
RIGHT UP THEIR CAMEL-CALLUSED BACK-SIDES!
BLESSED SPARTANS! THE BOLDEST OF MEN! THE FINEST WARRIORS IN ALL THE WORLD!
THEY WILL ACCEPT ME! THEY MUST ACCEPT ME!
FATHER! BELOVED MOTHER! YOU WILL SEE THAT YOU WERE RIGHT!
KRAK
THE HOT GATES.
THE AEGEAN BREEZE STILL CARRIES LAST NIGHT'S CHILL--
--HARDLY HINTING AT THE AUGUST HEAT THIS DAY WILL BRING.
THE SEA IS CALM. THE WATER BRACING, COLD AS ICE.
DILIOS SPINS HIS STORIES.
THE REPUBLICS WERE ASSEMBLED. THE GAMES WERE SET TO BEGIN. THE SUN GLARED DOWN UPON THE OLYMPIAD,BRUTAL. TEMPERS WERE SHORT. SURLY GREEKS EXCHANGED SURLY WORDS. AN OLD MAN ENTERED THE ARENA...
HIS STORY ABOUT THE OLYMPICS.
NOT HIS BEST.
SPARTANS! LISTEN--AND LEARN!
THAT PALTRY DOZEN YOU SLEW--THEY ARE NOTHING TO GREAT XERXES. THESE HILLS SWARM WITH OUR SCOUTS.
THEY MOVE LIKE SHADOWS.
...HE WAS BENT, THIS OLD MAN WAS. HIS EVERY BONE ACHED. HE PLEADED TO THE ATHENIANS FOR A PLACE TO SIT--
--AND THEY IGNORED HIM.
AND YOUR PATHETIC WALL--IT WILL FALL LIKE A HEAP OF DRY LEAVES...
...
LEANING HEAVY ON HIS WALKING STICK...

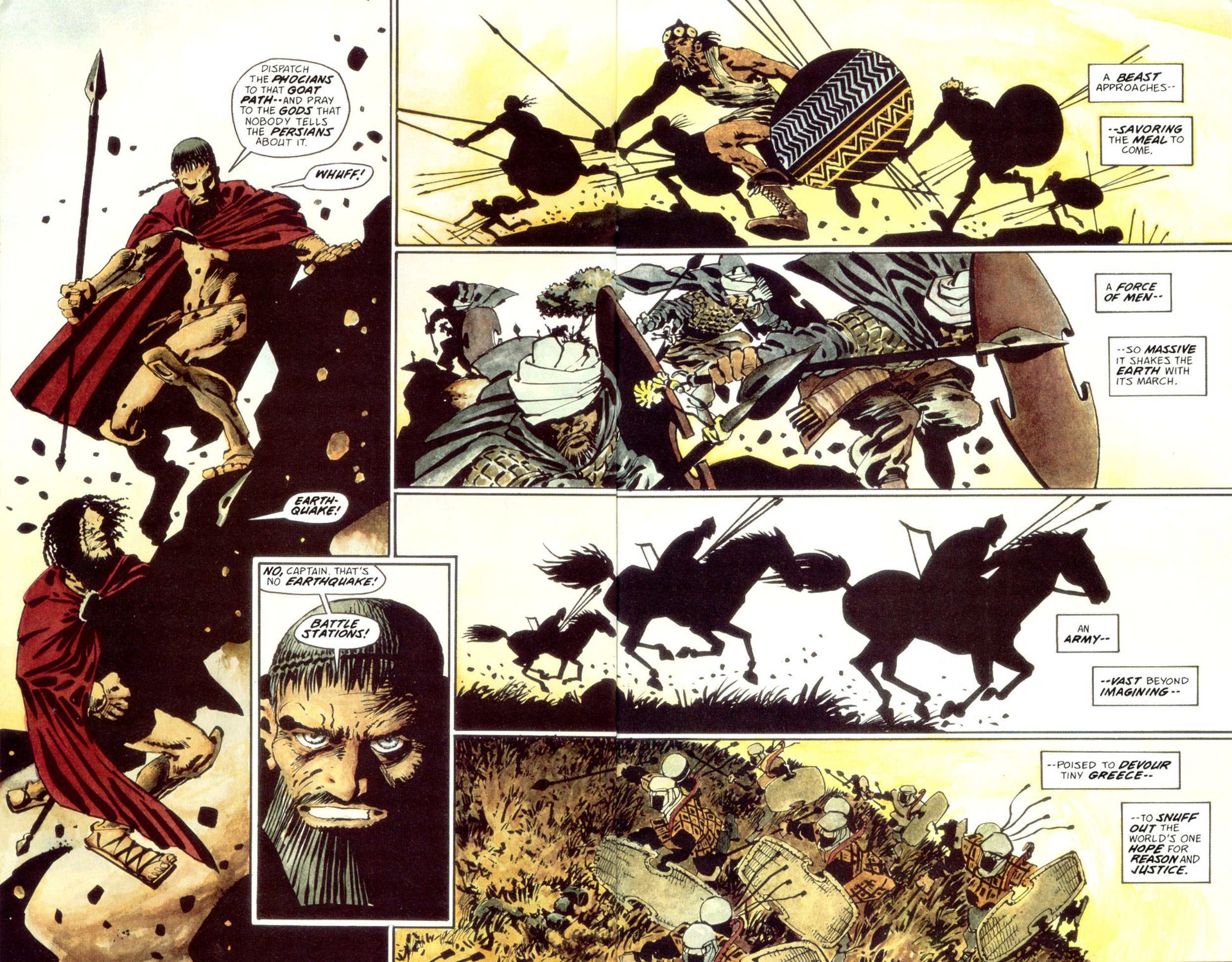


OUR PHOCIAN ALLIES BUILT THE WALL.
WE SPARTANS SUPPLIED THE MORTAR.
...DIZZY NOW, HIS KNEES QUAKING, THE OLD MAN BEGGED THE DELEGATES OF CORINTH-- OF MYKONOS-- OF NAXOS-- OF THIRA.
EACH TURNED A DEAF EAR TO HIS PLEA.
I SPEAK FOR GREAT XERXES. THE GOD-KING OFFERS YOU ONE LAST CHANCE--BEFORE ANNIHILATION.
TURN AND LISTEN, SPARTAN FOOL. YOU TEST MY PATIENCE.
AT LAST, THE OLD MAN STAGGERED TO THE SPARTAN DELEGATION-- AND BEFORE HE COULD CROAK OUT A SINGLE WORD--
--EVERY SPARTAN ROSE AS ONE--AND STEPPED ASIDE.
DAMN YOU! YOU WILL LISTEN!

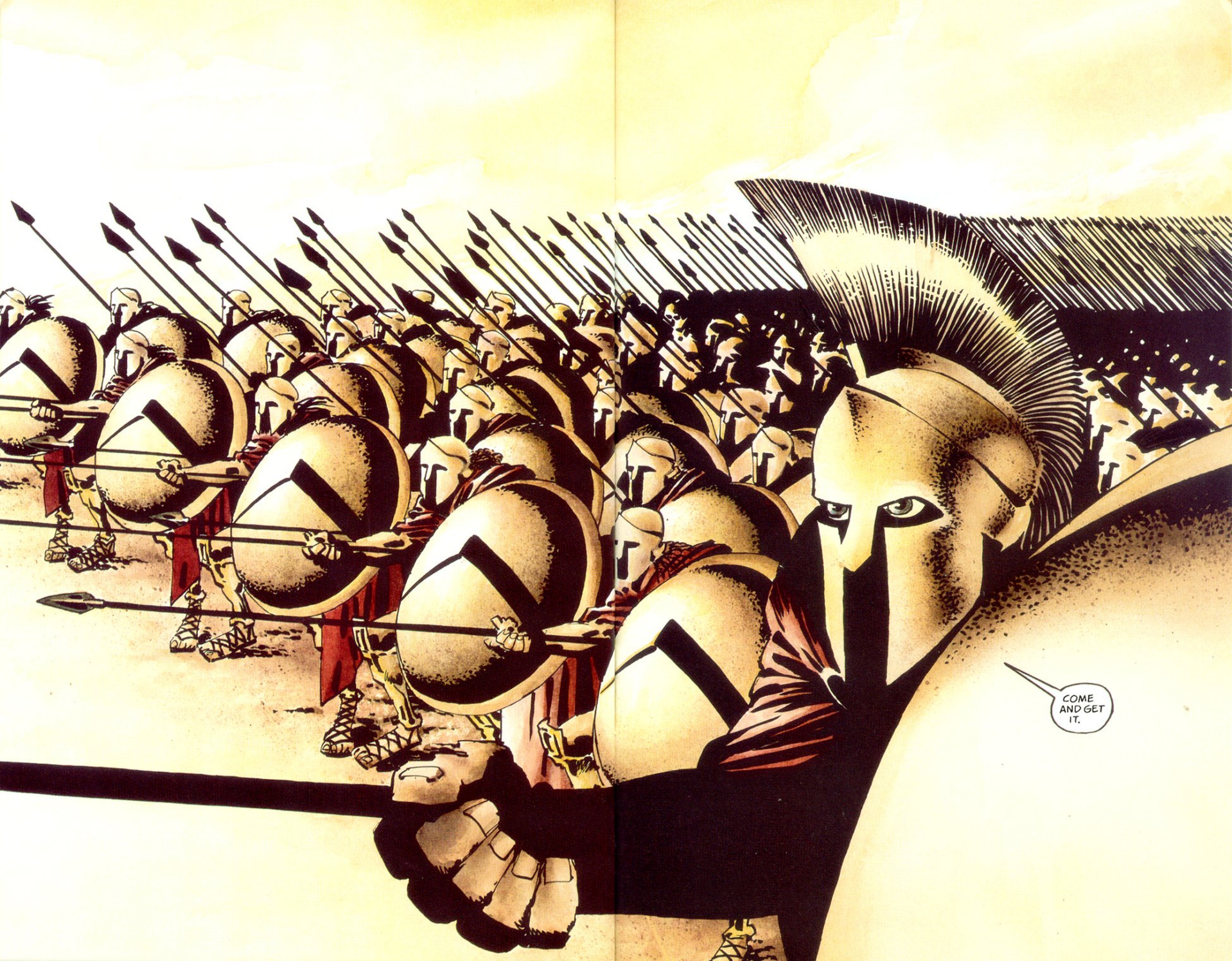

AND THE OLD MAN SHOOK HIS WALKING STICK AT ALL ASSEMBLED, HIS VOICE RISING TO A LION'S ROAR THAT RATTLED THE VERY STONES!
"EVERY GREEK KNOWS WHAT IS RIGHT," HE BELLOWED.
CHAKK
"EVERY GREEK KNOWS --BUT ONLY THE SPARTANS CHOOSE TO DO IT!"
NO FALSE MOVES, PERSIAN.
MY ARM...
IT'S NOT YOURS ANYMORE. NEITHER IS THE WHIP.
RUN BACK TO YOUR MASTER. TELL HIM HE FACES FREE MEN-- NOT SLAVES.
NOT SLAVES, NO. YOUR WOMEN WILL BE SLAVES. YOUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS AND BROTHERS AND ELDERS WILL BE SLAVES. BUT NOT YOU. BY THIS NOON --YOU WILL BE DEAD MEN!
ONE HUNDRED NATIONS DESCEND UPON YOU!
OUR ARROWS WILL BLOT OUT THE SUN!
THEN WE'LL FIGHT IN THE SHADE.


BE WARY. THESE COWARDS USE ARROWS-- AND THEY USE THEM WELL.
LET THEIR ARROWS FLY. STAY OUT OF SIGHT UNTIL THEIR CHARGE. WHEN THEY CLEAR THE LAST OF THE OLIVE TREES--AND NOT ONE HEARTBEAT BEFORE--HIT THEM WITH EVERYTHING YOU'VE GOT.
FASTER, YOU DOGS! FASTER!
WHAT WE'VE GOT IS LIMITED, KING LEONIDAS. THERE ARE ONLY A FEW DOZEN OF US.
WE'LL BE OUT OF JAVELINS AFTER THEIR FIRST CHARGE.
WE'LL BRING YOU FRESH SPEARS BY THE THOUSANDS. PERSIAN SPEARS--PLUCKED FROM PERSIAN DEAD.
OOF!
PICK UP THE PACE, PERSIAN.
DECENT SWORD-WORK, KID.
MAYBE NOW YOU'LL STOP CALLING ME "STUMBLIOS"?
HELL, NO!
CAPTAIN-- HAVE THE MEN FOUND ANY ROUTE THROUGH THE HILLS TO OUR BACK?
NONE, SIR.
THERE IS SUCH A ROUTE, GOOD KING.
JUST PAST THAT WESTERN RIDGE. IT'S AN OLD GOAT PATH. THE PERSIANS COULD USE IT TO OUT-FLANK US.
WISE KING--I HUMBLY REQUEST AN AUDIENCE.
NOT ONE STEP CLOSER, MONSTER--
--OR I'LL SKEWER YOU WHERE YOU STAND!
I GAVE NO SUCH ORDER, CAPTAIN. BACK OFF.
FORGIVE THE CAPTAIN. HE'S A GOOD SOLDIER--BUT A BIT SHORT ON MANNERS.
THERE IS NOTHING TO FORGIVE, BRAVE KING. I KNOW WHAT I LOOK LIKE.
I AM EPHIALTES. BORN OF SPARTA. MY MOTHER'S LOVE LED MY PARENTS TO FLEE SPARTA, LEST I BE DISCARDED. MY FATHER BECAME A SHEPHERD--BUT HE TAUGHT ME THE WARRIOR'S WAY.
I BEG YOU, BOLD KING, TO PERMIT ME TO REDEEM MY FATHER'S NAME BY SERVING YOU--IN COMBAT.
LET'S TAKE A WALK.


DAY AND NIGHT MY FATHER TRAINED ME--TO FEEL NO FEAR--TO SHOW NO PAIN--TO MAKE SPEAR AND SHIELD AND SWORD AS MUCH A PART OF ME AS MY OWN BEATING HEART.
HEFF
HUNFF!
YOU SEE? MY ARMS ARE STRONG. MY REACH IS LONG. I WILL EARN MY FATHER'S ARMOR, NOBLE KING--AND RECLAIM MY FAMILY'S HONOR!
I WILL KILL MANY PERSIANS!
A FINE THRUST. BUT...
...RAISE YOUR SHIELD. AS FAR UP AS YOU CAN.
HUFF
HUFF
HENFF...
YOUR FATHER SHOULD'VE TAUGHT YOU HOW OUR PHALANX WORKS. WE FIGHT AS A SINGLE, IMPENETRABLE UNIT. THAT'S THE SOURCE OF OUR STRENGTH.
EACH SPARTAN PROTECTS THE MAN TO HIS LEFT. FROM THIGH TO NECK. WITH HIS SHIELD. A SINGLE WEAK SPOT--AND THE PHALANX SHATTERS. FROM THIGH TO NECK, EPHIALTES.
YOU CAN'T HOLD YOUR SHIELD HIGH ENOUGH.
I'M SORRY, MY FRIEND. I CAN'T USE YOU.
MOTHER. FATHER. YOU WERE WRONG.
YOU WERE WRONG.
POOR SOUL.
MAY HE REST IN PEACE.


DISPATCH THE PHOCIANS TO THAT GOAT PATH--AND PRAY TO THE GODS THAT NOBODY TELLS THE PERSIANS ABOUT IT.
WHUFF!
EARTH-QUAKE!
NO, CAPTAIN, THAT'S NO EARTHQUAKE!
BATTLE STATIONS!
A BEAST APPROACHES--
--SAVORING THE MEAL TO COME.
A FORCE OF MEN--
--SO MASSIVE IT SHAKES THE EARTH WITH ITS MARCH.
AN ARMY--
--VAST BEYOND IMAGINING--
--POISED TO DEVOUR TINY GREECE--
--TO SNUFF OUT THE WORLD'S ONE HOPE FOR REASON AND JUSTICE.

PERSIANS!


COME AND GET IT.

SLINGS & ARROWS

c/o Dark Horse Comics, 10956 SE Main Street, Milwaukie, Oregon 97222
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Mark J. Kiewlak
Nanticoke, PA

No matter how many times you prove me wrong, I will still have a tendency to look at your work and, upon first glance, call it "thin" in terms of words on the page and the amount of "story" told.

Then I read those words — not one of them wasted nor used unnecessarily, more often than not used instead for the maximum possible effect, such as the simple and stirring poetry of the repeated "We march" in the opening.

Then I consider the amount of "story" — how we are introduced to an army which functions as one — and how we see the consequences for young "Stumblios" and for his captain when they disturb that perfect order — how we see the heart of the man who leads them, a heart forged in battle at such a young age against a merciless opponent. And, in a final bit of symmetry, we see a new opponent, no different that the old one, rise up — and Leonidas treat him just as he had the earlier one, turning his back on him in the final panel and preparing for the inevitable attack.

I wonder if Leonidas doesn't welcome this new challenge after so long — if perhaps he wished to prove himself in his old age as he did in his youth, to show himself worthy of the God-like worship he commands. I wonder if that isn't why he sought the least diplomatic solution and, knowing full well the consequences, treated the messenger from Persia with such brutality and disdain.

I wonder about a whole lot of things in this new-very-old story. But not you, Mr. Miller. Nor about the worthwhileness of this latest story-telling endeavor. You keep on doing what you're doing . . . and we'll all be better off for it.

Dan H. Eiler
Newton Falls, OH

Although I think of you as the king of chiaroscuro, I'm happy to see you back doing art-work for a color project (and please tell Lynn Varley she's been greatly missed). Of course, this sample marks just the beginning of your project, so it's difficult to tell exactly what you're aiming to accomplish and impossible to tell whether these first, creative steps are the right ones, but your start is auspicious. Your pacing is dynamic and draws the reader in. I don't know how much of a "team book" this will turn out to be, but the Spartan soldiers in the first few pages are individuated enough for you to go that way. Your presentation of Sparta's king, Leonidas, paints the portrait of a leader in bold but revealing strokes. My knowledge of ancient Greek history is spotty at best, but I can remember that Sparta was Greece's most militant city-state because of its huge slave population; the Spartans had to be prepared to put down any home-grown insurrections. I hope you'll go into that aspect of their culture later in the series.

I like that you're finding the right balance between pictures and captions in your work. In *Ronin*, and even in some of your *Sin City* features, your prose has been sparse. And full frontal male nudity?! Gee, I can remember the first time I saw female *cleavage* in a comic book, in an old Joe Kubert *Sgt. Rock* story. Have you chosen ancient Greece for your story, I wonder, because the classical setting will make it easier for you to shatter yet another comics taboo?

I was delighted by the look ahead at this, your newest project. I will follow it faithfully to its conclusion and will buy any sequels. (That is, until Leonidas teams up with Spider-Man. Then I'm outta here!)

You and me both. Leonidas only picked fights with enemies who stood *some* kind of chance against him.

Keith Haney
Athens, TN

This series will probably rank up there with the best work of your career. I have been a history fanatic since grade school, and while my knowledge of ancient Greece is mostly general and scanty, I have long known about that famous stand-off at Thermopylae. My first exposure to it was an old movie, the title of which I have never known, retelling it in the usual, grand, distorted Hollywood fashion so common to the movies. I later learned about the general historic details of the battle in my sophomore year in high school. Then, I saw one brief little aside on the first page of the last part of your own *Big Fat Kill*. But I would never have even guessed that you would make it into a full-fledged miniseries. But having read through the preview twice, I'm glad that you did.

I would like to present my sincere compliments to Lynn Varley. If Ms. Schutz's claim that the Xeroxes provided [as the preview] do not do Ms. Varley's fine work justice, than I am expecting some great things with the finished copy. In an era of computer art and separations, Ms. Varley is a standout on the basis of her reliance on the old-fashioned method of coloring alone. But, from the first scenes of the Spartan army marching at dawn, her colors prove to be, as always, the perfect complement to your art. Of your art, I will say no more than that it is your usual high standard of such aesthetic and storytelling matters. Any other compliments on this point would simply be superfluous on my part. Of the one thing that I buy any comic for — the story — I can sum up in three little words: *I love it!* I'm sure a few folks are going to be shocked over the severe sets of punishments for doing anything that disrupts the dignity and discipline of the Spartan army, but I can't say I was one of them. Sparta, after all, was an absolute despotism (which is really the natural state of most of the world's governments), where obedience is an understood way of life. Any deviation from this in such places is not tolerated.

The story of King Leonidas' initiation was a nice touch, as was the king's reaction to it: "Children. Such noise. Get your sleep." I guess after you hear the same story a hundred times, you get bored in a hurry. But the really funny part was the flashback to the arrival of the Persian messenger. If I had lived in that time and place, met this guy, and heard why he was riding to Sparta, I'd have laughed in his face. Sparta, the military boot camp of the Peloponnesian peninsula, submitting to the authority of some pompous jackass in distant Persia? What Xerxes was trying to do by sending this mission (other than get rid of a few incompetent soldiers in his army) is beyond me. The pride of King Leonidas was, at least, the equal of the Persian prince, and such men do not give an inch on such matters. But the most poignant part of this segment was the quiet reflections of Leonidas himself, thinking of the men that he is about to send to their graves and the new beast he must face. Despite the fact that he thought he had provoked the Persians, he had so much of his city's character that he literally could not do anything else and call himself a man. It was either submit to the Persians without a fight or take them on and damn the odds. As Leonidas pointed out to the messenger, they did have a reputation to maintain.

The movie, called *The 300 Spartans*, was released in 1962. I saw it when I was five — and have been entranced with the Hot Gates ever since. While it's kind of a clunky old show, it's surprisingly accurate — and it sure inspired *this* kid.

Tony Daley
Chicago, IL

Historical fiction demands a special responsibility from the creator, who must use the full resources of his sentiment, knowledge, and skills to establish drama while holding, as much as possible, to the truth of events.

Yet truth is usually malleable, depending on the quality of research and investigation. Therefore, if Mel Gibson makes errors about the life of Sir William Wallace in *Braveheart*, we will forgive if the narrative is adept. If *Lew* Wallace fudged on details of ancient Rome, do we care, if we are sufficiently engaged by the exploits of Ben-Hur? Similarly, historical novelists from Mary Renault to Gary Jennings can be absolved of blame if occasionally there is an anachronism or a gaffe in historicity.

Thus, what you are doing while leading up to Thermopylae — to the mythology of those days of heroic resistance — matters more in terms of dramatic elements than verisimilitude.

With *300*, you have marshaled the best of your skills while muting the lesser. The lesser are, of course, certain particulars of writing and of visual presentation. However, if the figures sometimes seem more stiff than those in Jack Katz's *First Kingdom*, or the language suffers from mannerism or structural inelegance, we forgive in light of your ability to paint in broad, cinematic strokes the processes and degrees of events and actions.

You've particularly mastered the technique of panel placement, moving smaller boxes within larger, panoramic rectangles; using static pictures better than ever in making a convincing show of camera movement. Especially effective were the foreshortened layouts from high angles; I'm not sure if you were using high shots for thematic or purely formal purposes, but they worked. And, of course, the anatomy has come a long way from even *The Dark Knight Returns*. You're approaching the level of prime Ditko — the Ditko of the Warren stories back in the sixties, especially. Like Ditko, you apparently learned in the trench warfare of comics, not the classrooms of art schools. You developed certain abilities, while replicating mistakes and misconceptions. Ditko admitted to his own shortcomings as an artist, but Ditko was, like Kirby, a supreme comic-book artist. What one would find ghastly in Delacroix, one would accept within the vocabulary of graphic stories.

Historical fiction is like algebra, where the unknown factors remain unknown. There's no way to sum up to a whole, perfect, rational number. If there is a sum, it is irrational — a series of fractions dancing into infinity, the fractions of splintered historical perspective. Happily, you've tackled something different from your hard-boiled *Sin* material. You've gone beyond post-modern, mean-streets hucksterism. Your thoughts are richer these days, from the evidence of *300*. You've colored the time of Leonidas and Xerxes with the patois and response and attitude of a sharp ex-New Yorker, while painting in the rich colors of spectacle. You've put skin and muscle and bone behind the battered shields and greaves of your warriors. There is not much

depth here — but there is enough pageantry, like the best of DeMille.

In short, another example of Millerian resistance against the Persian hordes of comicdom's mediocrity.

Matt Halsey
Edison, NJ

It isn't too often that one finds historical comics, let alone comics about events that took place 2500 years ago. As I read *300* #1, I found myself engrossed in the story. Leonidas seems very distraught; I took it that he's probably mulling over his small force's prospect against the massive army. He seems to be looking back with regret at the end of the issue, focusing on the day he received the Persian messenger and declined the Persians' offer.

Issue #2 continues the story effectively. We learn about Leonidas, how the Persians bribed the Ephors to give Leonidas false advice, knowing that Greeks were bound to follow the priests' words as law.

The *color* preview of issue #2 was far more beautiful than issue #1; not that Frank's line art is bad, but Varley's colors add entire dimensions to the story. It's so great to see them working together. *300* is truly the type of project that is deserving of their collaboration.

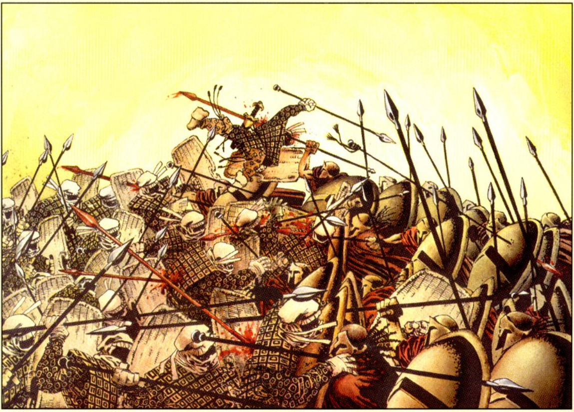
Chris Adams
Meriden, CT

Ancient Greece, huh? Hardly the first place that springs to mind as a setting for a comic-book story. But it's a wonderful place to tell a good story. You certainly appear to be doing that. A small group of soldiers marching off into the face of certain doom to defend their homeland against a mammoth invasion force — how could you not want to read more? Especially when it looks like this. The art was stellar, as usual. The two-page splash format seems to add to the grandeur of the story. I look forward to some epic battle scenes. The black-and-white of the preview issue didn't detract in the slightest. You're one of the few artists whom I like as much, if not more, in black-and-white. I think the Spartans' grim march to war looked damn fine without color. I'll have to wait until May to see if color adds as much as I think it will.

By now you know. It does. It does.
— Frank Miller

Next issue:

COMBAT



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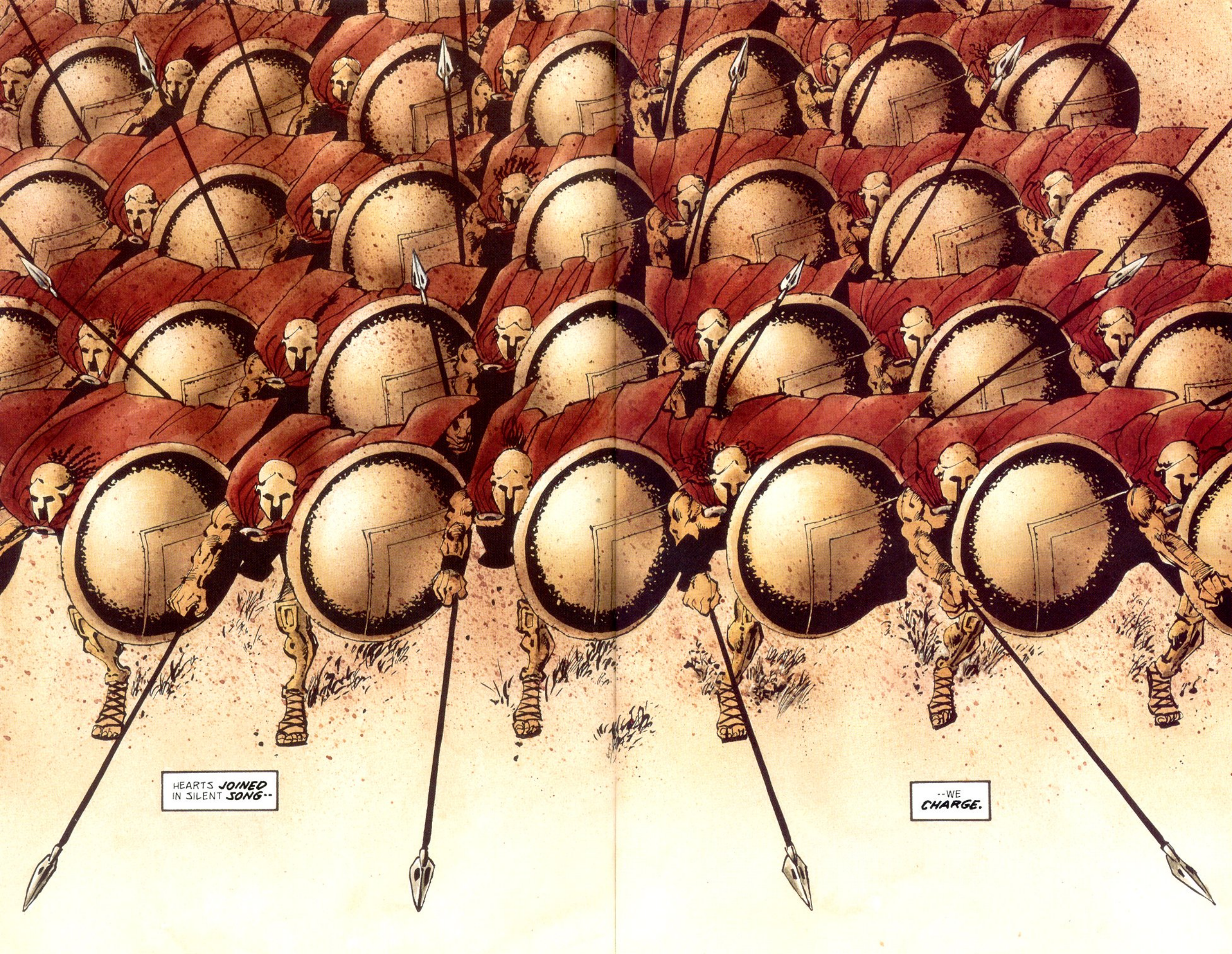
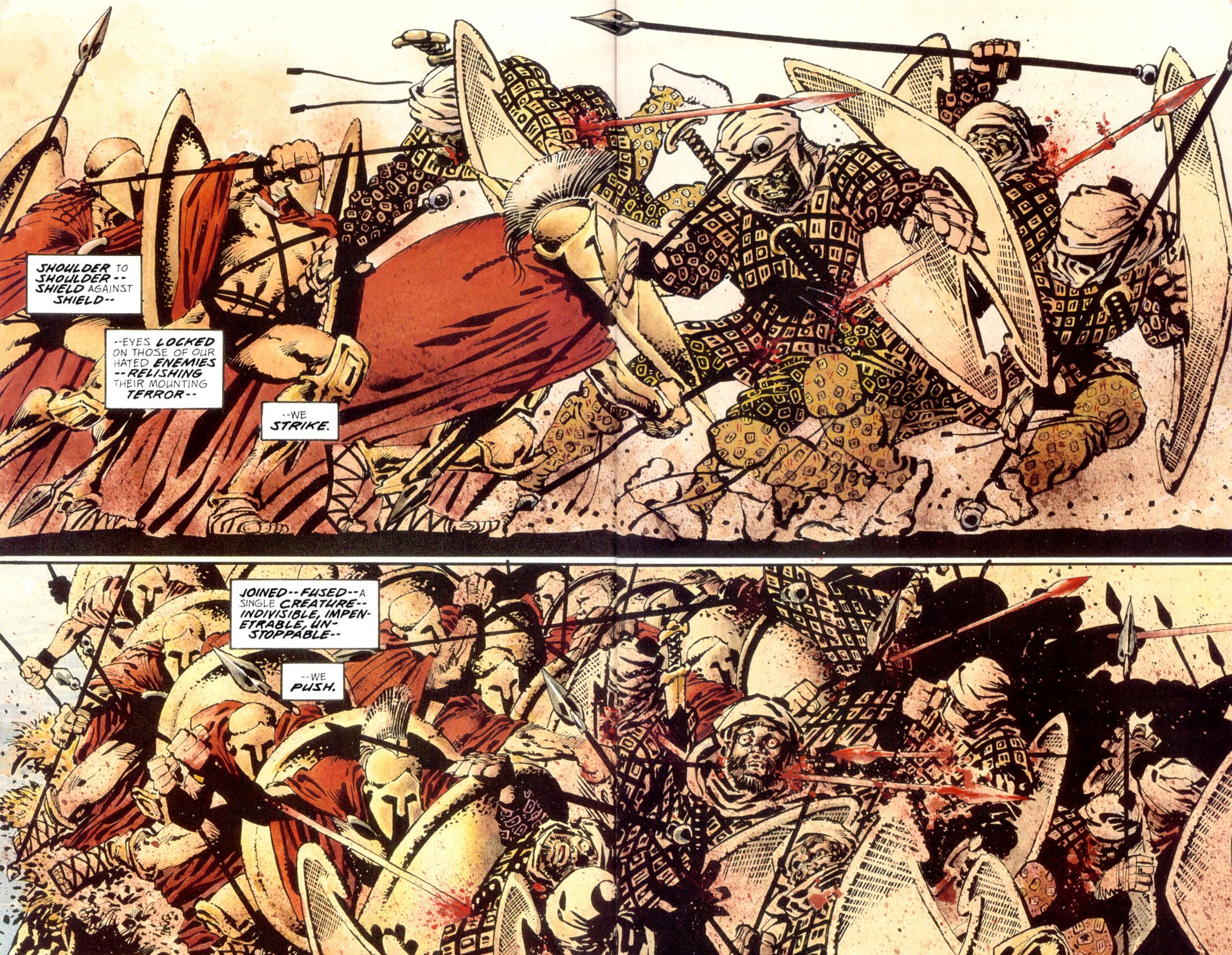
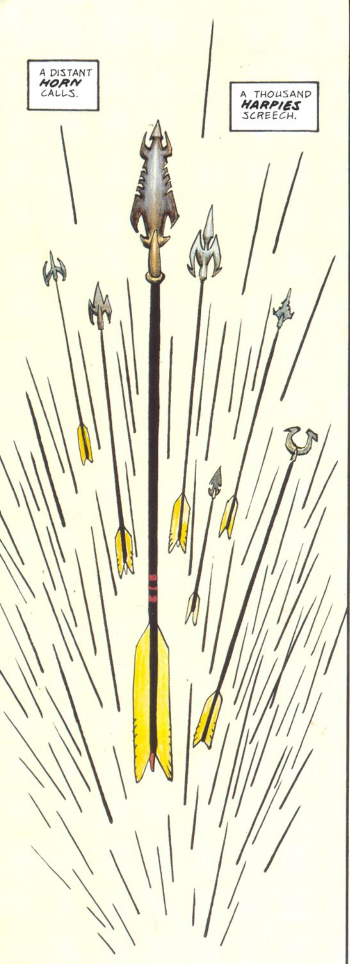
CHAPTER FOUR:

COMBAT

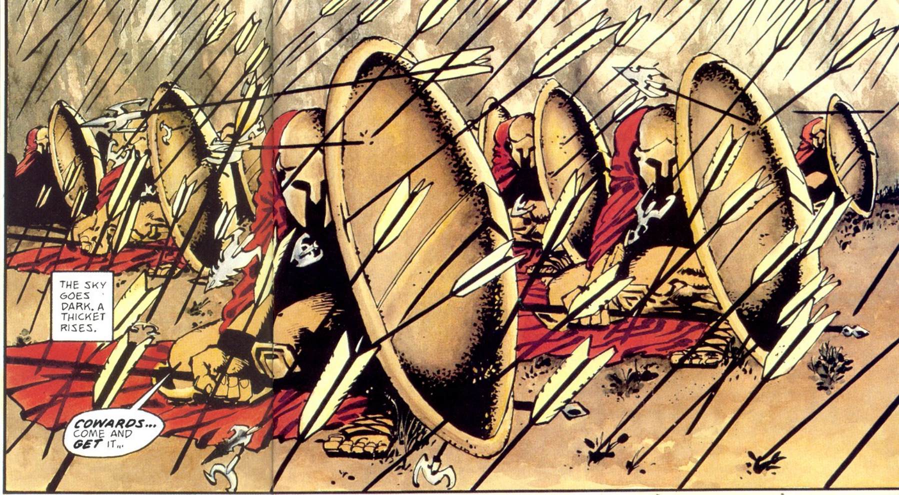

HEARTS JOINED IN SILENT SONG--
--WE CHARGE.


SHOULDER TO SHOULDER -- SHIELD AGAINST SHIELD--
--EYES LOCKED ON THOSE OF OUR HATED ENEMIES --RELISHING THEIR MOUNTING TERROR--
--WE STRIKE.
JOINED--FUSED--A SINGLE CREATURE-- INDIVISIBLE, IMPENETRABLE, UNSTOPPABLE--
--WE PUSH.

PERSIANS GASP AND GROAN AND GURGLE AND SCREAM AND STUMBLE AND TUMBLE AND FALL, BRAINS SPLATTERING ACROSS BRINY STONE, LUNGS SUCKING DEEP OF THE DEADLY, SALTY SEA.
WE SPARTANS LAUGH LIKE FOOLS--AND KEEP PUSHING.
NO PRISONERS.
NO MERCY.
WE'RE OFF TO ONE HELL OF A GOOD START.
THE FIRST DAY

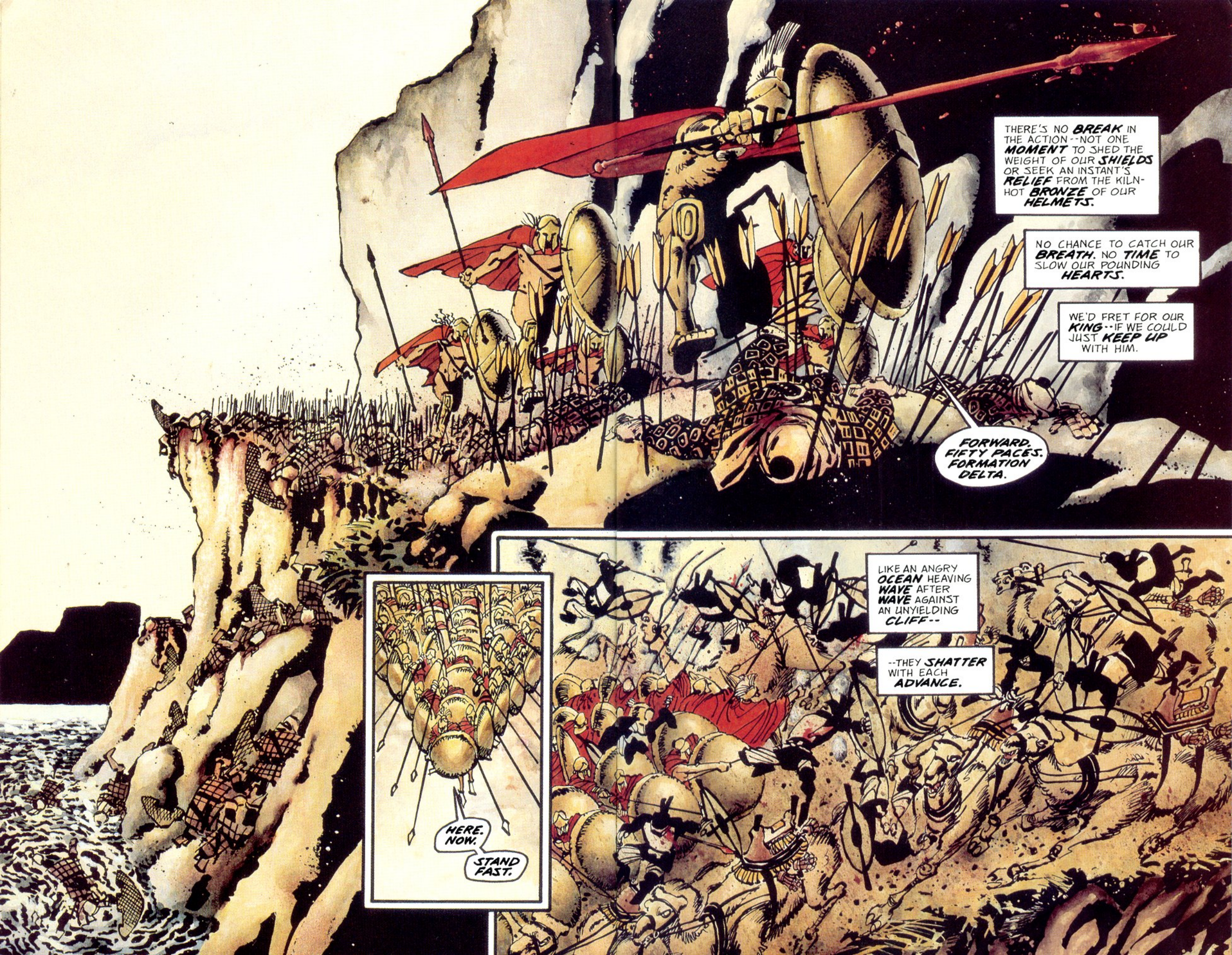


A DISTANT HORN CALLS.
A THOUSAND HARPIES SCREECH.

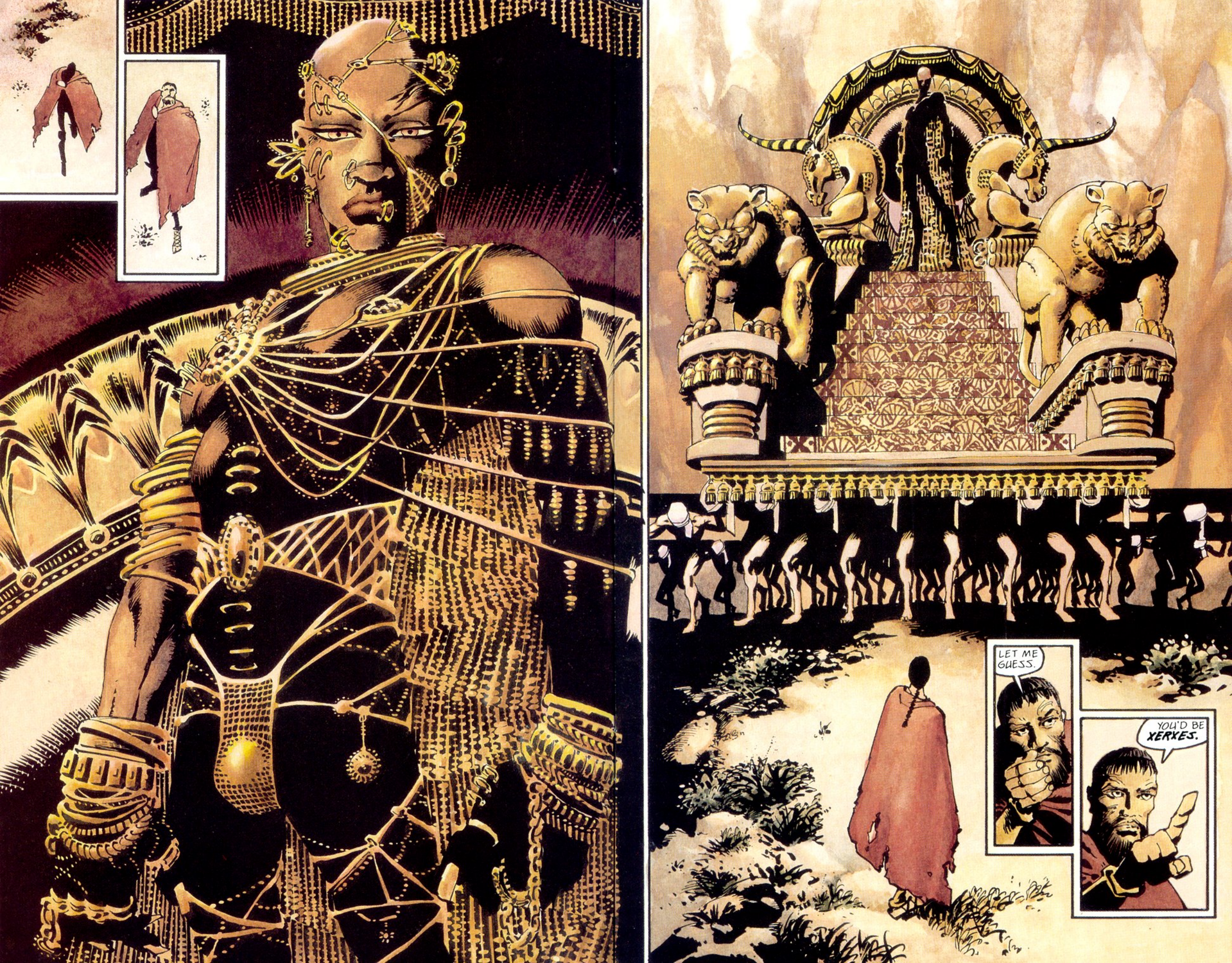


THE SKY GOES DARK. A THICKET RISES.
COWARDS... COME AND GET IT...

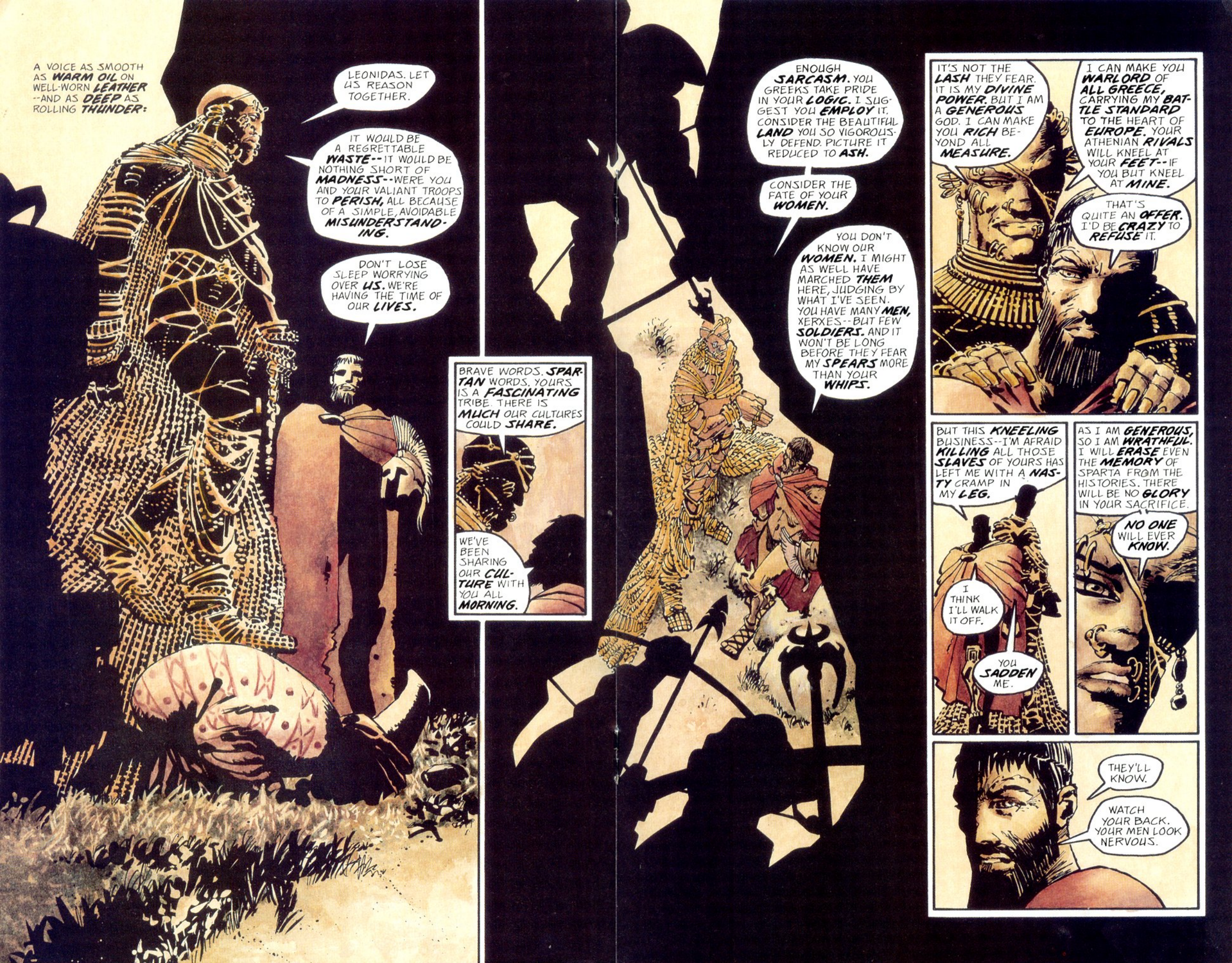
ONE HUNDRED NATIONS DESCEND UPON US.
SNORTING, SNARLING DESERT BEASTS.
HOWLING BARBARIANS.
THE ARMIES OF ALL ASIA--
--PLEDGED TO CRUSH THE IMPERTINENT REPUBLICS OF GREECE--
--TO MAKE SLAVES OF THE ONLY FREE MEN THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN.


THERE'S NO BREAK IN THE ACTION--NOT ONE MOMENT TO SHED THE WEIGHT OF OUR SHIELDS OR SEEK AN INSTANT'S RELIEF FROM THE KILN-HOT BRONZE OF OUR HELMETS.
NO CHANCE TO CATCH OUR BREATH. NO TIME TO SLOW OUR POUNDING HEARTS.
WE'D FRET FOR OUR KING--IF WE COULD JUST KEEP UP WITH HIM.
FORWARD. FIFTY PACES. FORMATION DELTA.
HERE. NOW.
STAND FAST.
LIKE AN ANGRY OCEAN HEAVING WAVE AFTER WAVE AGAINST AN UNYIELDING CLIFF--
--THEY SHATTER WITH EACH ADVANCE.

KUNCH
KUNCH
KUNCH
WE DO WHAT WE WERE TRAINED TO DO.
KUNCH
WHAT WE WERE BRED TO DO.
KUNCH
WHAT WE WERE BORN TO DO.
KUNCH
MERCY!
GYAA
COWARD!
KUNCH
NO PRISONERS.
KUNCH
NO MERCY.
KUNCH
A GOOD START.
KUNCH
AFTERNOON. NO MOVEMENT FROM THE PERSIAN CAMP.
WE SET OUR SHIELDS DOWN AND PULL OUR HELMETS OFF AND SHAKE AWAY OUR SWEAT. WE BIND OUR WOUNDS-- AND PUT THE FINISHING TOUCHES TO THE MORNING'S WORK.
NO PRISONERS.
NO MERCY.
GGAKK
KUNCH
HURKK
KUNCH
KUNCH
GHAA
THE ARCADIANS ARE GETTING TWITCHY, SIRE. THEY'RE BEGGING FOR A CRACK AT THE PERSIANS.
GOOD. I'VE GOT A FLANKING MANEUVER IN MIND FOR THEM --AND I WANT THEM EAGER. TELL DAXOS TO HAVE THEM SOBER AND READY FOR THE NEXT CHARGE. WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, GET THEIR HELP PILING THE CORPSES ONTO THAT MOUND. STACK THEM HIGH.
LOOK NOW-- THERE'S AN EXCITED YOUNG FELLOW...
HEFF HEFF
KING LEONIDAS!
STELIOS. CATCH YOUR BREATH, BOY.
YES, MY LORD.
HUFF HUFF
PERSIANS APPROACH, MY LORD. A SMALL CONTINGENT-- TOO SMALL FOR AN ATTACK.
MAYBE THEY FEEL LIKE A CHAT.
I'M ON MY WAY, CAPTAIN. YOU'RE IN CHARGE.
BUT, SIRE--
RELAX. IF THEY ASSASSINATE ME, ALL SPARTA GOES TO WAR.
PRAY THEY'RE THAT STUPID. PRAY WE'RE THAT LUCKY.
BESIDES, THERE'S NO REASON WE CAN'T BE CIVIL, IS THERE?
NONE, SIRE.
KUNCH
GAA

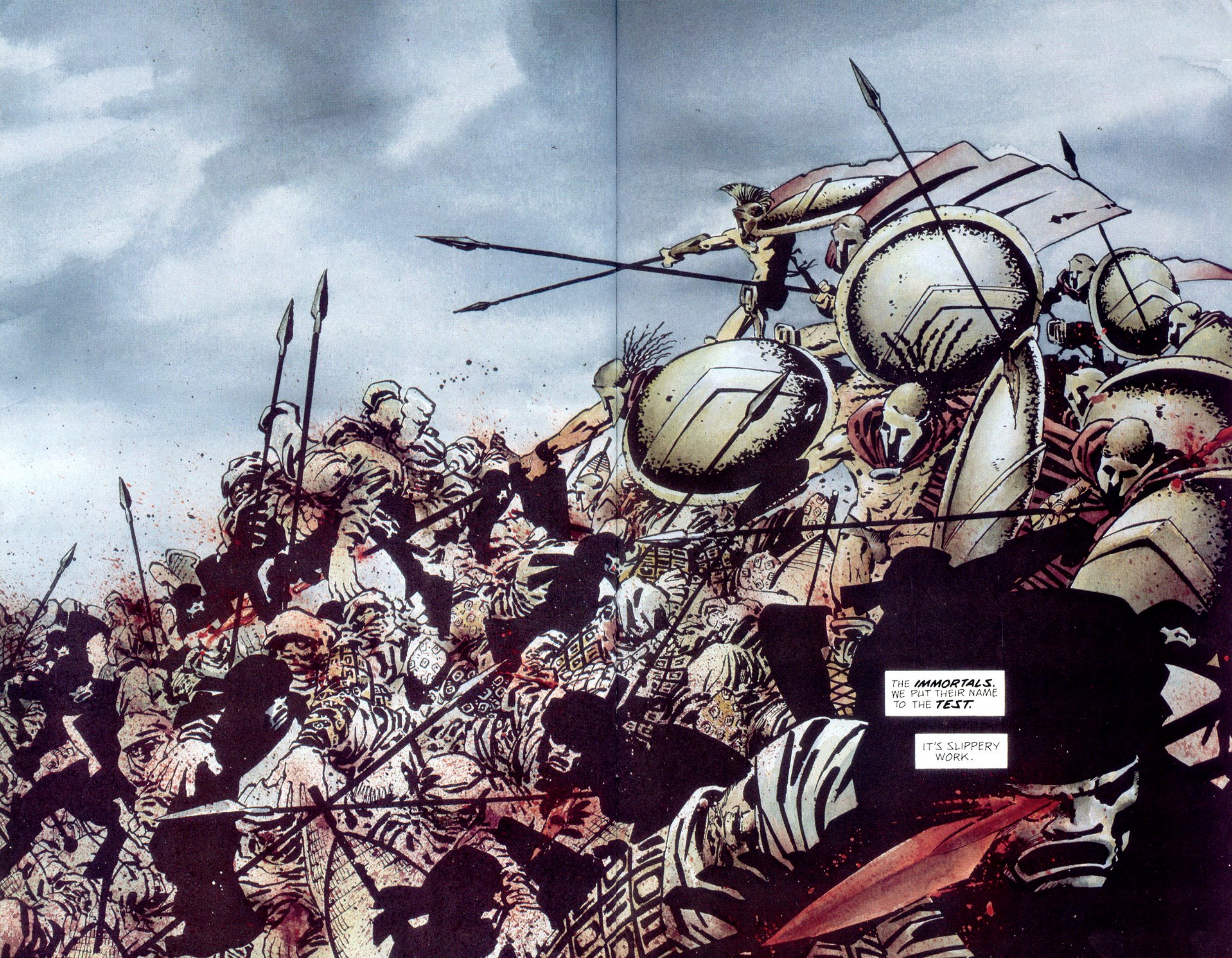


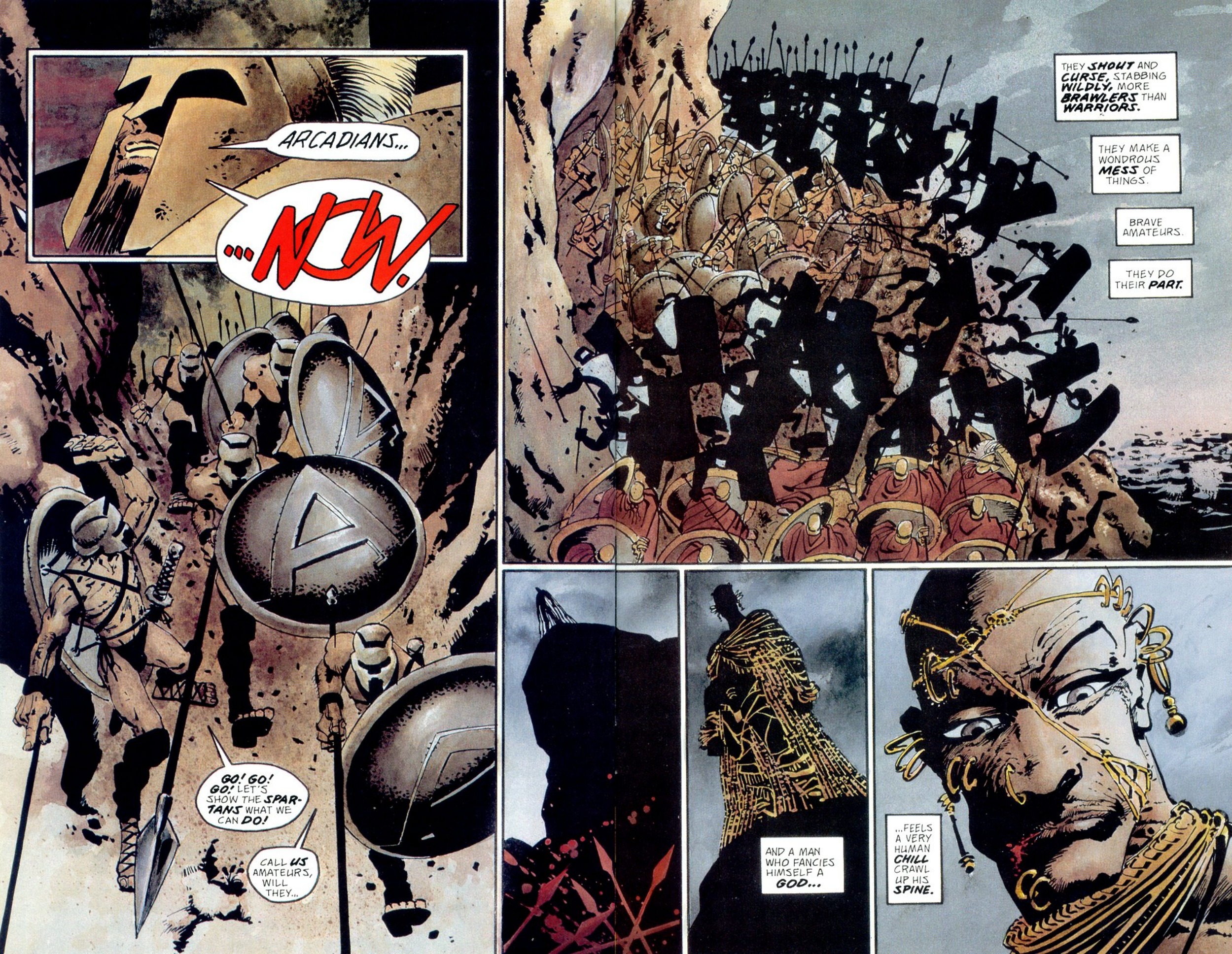
LET ME GUESS.
YOU'D BE XERXES.


A VOICE AS SMOOTH AS WARM OIL ON WELL-WORN LEATHER --AND AS DEEP AS ROLLING THUNDER:
LEONIDAS. LET US REASON TOGETHER.
IT WOULD BE A REGRETTABLE WASTE-- IT WOULD BE NOTHING SHORT OF MADNESS--WERE YOU AND YOUR VALIANT TROOPS TO PERISH, ALL BECAUSE OF A SIMPLE, AVOIDABLE MISUNDERSTANDING.
DON'T LOSE SLEEP WORRYING OVER US. WE'RE HAVING THE TIME OF OUR LIVES.
BRAVE WORDS. SPARTAN WORDS. YOURS IS A FASCINATING TRIBE. THERE IS MUCH OUR CULTURES COULD SHARE.
WE'VE BEEN SHARING OUR CULTURE WITH YOU ALL MORNING.
ENOUGH SARCASM. YOU GREEKS TAKE PRIDE IN YOUR LOGIC. I SUGGEST YOU EMPLOY IT. CONSIDER THE BEAUTIFUL LAND YOU SO VIGOROUSLY DEFEND. PICTURE IT REDUCED TO ASH.
CONSIDER THE FATE OF YOUR WOMEN.
YOU DON'T KNOW OUR WOMEN. I MIGHT AS WELL HAVE MARCHED THEM HERE, JUDGING BY WHAT I'VE SEEN. YOU HAVE MANY MEN, XERXES--BUT FEW SOLDIERS. AND IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE THEY FEAR MY SPEARS MORE THAN YOUR WHIPS.
IT'S NOT THE LASH THEY FEAR. IT IS MY DIVINE POWER. BUT I AM A GENEROUS GOD. I CAN MAKE YOU RICH BEYOND ALL MEASURE.
I CAN MAKE YOU WARLORD OF ALL GREECE, CARRYING MY BATTLE STANDARD TO THE HEART OF EUROPE. YOUR ATHENIAN RIVALS WILL KNEEL AT YOUR FEET--IF YOU BUT KNEEL AT MINE.
THAT'S QUITE AN OFFER. I'D BE CRAZY TO REFUSE IT.
BUT THIS KNEELING BUSINESS--I'M AFRAID KILLING ALL THOSE SLAVES OF YOURS HAS LEFT ME WITH A NASTY CRAMP IN MY LEG.
I THINK I'LL WALK IT OFF.
AS I AM GENEROUS, SO I AM WRATHFUL. I WILL ERASE EVEN THE MEMORY OF SPARTA FROM THE HISTORIES. THERE WILL BE NO GLORY IN YOUR SACRIFICE.
NO ONE WILL EVER KNOW.
YOU SADDEN ME.
THEY'LL KNOW.
WATCH YOUR BACK. YOUR MEN LOOK NERVOUS.

THE KING CAN SCARCELY CONTAIN HIMSELF! WHAT FINE FORTUNE!
XERXES HAS BETRAYED A FATAL FLAW:
HUBRIS.
HUBRIS. HE THINKS HE'S A GOD.
HUBRIS. IT MAKES A FOOL OF ANY MAN.
EASY TO TAUNT.
EASY TO TRICK.
HE'LL TAKE THE BAIT. HE WILL.
EXCUSE ME, CAPTAIN, BUT... DID YOU HEAR WHAT HE CALLED ME?
WHO?
THE KING. HE CALLED ME STELIOS. THAT'S MY NAME. HE DIDN'T CALL ME "STUMBLIOS."
I HEARD HIM CALL YOU "BOY," BOY.
MOVE IT, MEN!
PILE THOSE PERSIANS HIGH. UNLESS I MISS MY GUESS--
--WE'RE IN FOR ONE WILD NIGHT!
AND, CAPTAIN--YOU WILL ADDRESS STELIOS BY HIS PROPER NAME.
YES, MY LORD.
HMF! ISN'T THE KING IN A GENEROUS MOOD...
THE FIRST NIGHT

WORDLESS-- THEIR FORM FAULTLESS-- MOVING IN SUCH PERFECT UNISON EACH COLLECTIVE STEP STRIKES THE EARTH LIKE A BLOW FROM THE FIRE GOD'S HAMMER-- THEY MARCH.
THE PERSONAL GUARD TO KING XERXES. THE PERSIAN WARRIOR ELITE. THE DEADLIEST FIGHTING FORCE IN ALL ASIA.
THE IMMORTALS.
NOW, WHILE WE ARE FRESH AND AT OUR FULL STRENGTH-- BEFORE WOUNDS AND WEARINESS HAVE TAKEN THEIR TOLL --THE MAD KING THROWS THE BEST HE HAS AT US.
SPARTANS...
...PUSH.
XERXES HAS TAKEN THE BAIT.
AND NOW THE TRAP IS SPRUNG.


THE IMMORTALS. WE PUT THEIR NAME TO THE TEST.
IT'S SLIPPERY WORK.


ARCADIANS...
...NOW.
GO! GO! GO! LET'S SHOW THE SPARTANS WHAT WE CAN DO!
CALL US AMATEURS, WILL THEY...
THEY SHOUT AND CURSE, STABBING WILDLY, MORE BRAWLERS THAN WARRIORS.
THEY MAKE A WONDROUS MESS OF THINGS.
BRAVE AMATEURS.
THEY DO THEIR PART.
AND A MAN WHO FANCIES HIMSELF A GOD...
...FEELS A VERY HUMAN CHILL CRAWL UP HIS SPINE.

CHILDREN, CHILDREN...
TRIUMPH. THE DAY IS OURS.
THE DREAD IMMORTALS SLINK BACK TO THEIR CAMP LIKE WHIPPED DOGS--AND EVERY PERSIAN SEES IT.
WHOM WILL XERXES DARE TO DISPATCH NEXT?
AND WHO AMONG HIS LEGIONS WILL DARE TO FACE THE SPARTANS?
EVEN THE KING ALLOWS HIMSELF TO HOPE--FOR MORE THAN GLORY.
SUCH MAD HOPE--BUT THERE IT IS.
AGAINST ASIA'S ENDLESS HORDES--AGAINST ALL ODDS--WE CAN DO IT. WE CAN HOLD THE HOT GATES.
WE CAN WIN.
EVEN AS WE RUB OIL INTO STIFFENED MUSCLES AND SEAL TORN FLESH WITH RED-HOT IRON--EVEN AS WE BID FAREWELL TO OUR HONORED DEAD--EACH HOUR BRINGS GOOD TIDINGS.
THE ATHENIAN FLEET HAS ENGAGED THE FOE AT SEA, HACKING MERCILESSLY AT XERXES' NAVY.
AND BACK ON LAND, AT THE PERSIAN CAMP--BLESSED CHAOS.
CHAOS! THE MEDES AND SCYTHIANS ARE IN OPEN REVOLT! XERXES IS SLAUGHTERING HIS OWN TROOPS!
HA! THERE'S NOTHING THAT CAN STOP US! NOTHING!
SETTLE DOWN, BOY. DON'T GET COCKY.
LIFE'S FULL OF SURPRISES.
KHAFF
GODS...I STILL BREATHE ...I STILL LIVE... GODS--YOU ARE CRUEL!
DAMN YOU!
DAMN YOU. DAMN YOU, GODS! DAMN YOU, FATHER! DAMN YOU, MOTHER! DAMN YOU ALL TO HELL!
HENFF
SPARTANS...
...SPARTANS! THE BOLDEST OF MEN! THE FINEST WARRIORS IN ALL THE WORLD!
DAMN YOU!
PTUI
DAMN YOU ALL!

SLINGS & ARROWS

c/o Dark Horse Comics, 10956 SE Main Street, Milwaukie, Oregon 97222
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Gerry Alanguilan
San Pablo City, Philippines

There is a feeling I get when I read Frank's stories, and it is a feeling I get only from him. My pulse races, and my heart beats faster, and the pages pound with the power of the story and the images. This is a feeling I felt when I read *Born Again* and *Man Without Fear,* and, to some extent, *Sin City*. *300* gives me all that and more.

The art is laid out as all double-page spreads, and understandably so. A story of this kind can never be fully told through traditional means. The story and the characters are all so big, it seems like the comic book is too small to contain them. If it is true that this book shall eventually be compiled in an oversized format, I think that would be a great idea. It would serve this story well.

Frank's art is reminiscent of *Ronin* and *Dark Knight* with a little bit of *Sin City* thrown in. What impressed me most of all are his layouts. Frank is a genius at composing pages. He knows just how and where to put the elements to provoke the reaction he wants. The shot of the soldiers marching through a field is so beautifully composed, I felt I wanted to cut it up and frame it.

I was expecting Lynn's colors to be as vibrant and as intricate as what she did in *Elektra Lives Again*. I was disappointed to see that the coloring was a lot more simple. My disappointment vanished quickly, though. "Simple," in this case, is quite deceiving. The colors are subtle and well chosen. I find myself looking at the pictures over and over. Absolutely beautiful!

As I went on reading, I simply got so lost in the story that when I flipped the page and there was no more, I felt frustrated! No! There has got to be more! One more month? I don't think I can wait that long. Frank knows just what buttons to push and when to push them. And he does it with impunity! This is a reaction I get when I read a Frank Miller book and *only* from a Frank Miller book.

My hat's off to you, Frank, and Lynn, too! Great job!

Patrick Marcel
manticor@cyberstation.fr

Naive me. Here I was, all set to enjoy *300*. The artwork is Miller in fine form, the narration is superb, and the colors are gorgeous. Plus, here was a welcome relief from all these *Sin City* Chandler/Spillane pastiches I am so bored with.

Then I got to: "If those boy-lovers found that kind of nerve . . ."

Ah.

One is to infer from the phrase that "boy-lovers" are considered despicable and cowardly by Spartans. Since Miller's Spartans are shown as the epitome of brute, butch coolness, everybody just knows *they* are real, John Wayne-type, 100% full red-blooded males.

Unfortunately, anybody even remotely knowledgeable with ancient Greece knows also that Spartans were as much boy-lovers as the effete Athenians. Indeed, the cohesion of their army was due to the fact that the soldiers were lovers. So this insult to Athenians rings glaringly out of place.

So, either Miller has reduced his research on Thermopylae to the Big Little Book version of it, which makes this story descend into the category of so much Hollywood-style revisionism, or he's just twisting historical truth for the cheap thrill of including another homophobic barb. It's not his first; I doubt it'll be his last.

Still, to depict Leonidas and his men as homophobes is . . .

Well, it's Miller again. Gorgeous work, ugly subtexts. Sigh . . .

And here I was all set to enjoy *300*.

"Ah," indeed. Tap the knee and the foot kicks.

If I allowed my characters to express only my own attitudes and beliefs, my work would be pretty damn boring. If I wrote to please grievance groups, my work would be propaganda.

For the record: being a warrior class, the Spartans almost certainly did practice homosexuality. There's also evidence they tended to lie about it. It's not a big leap to postulate that they ridiculed their hedonistic Athenian rivals for something they themselves did. "Hypocrisy" is, after all, a word we got from the Greeks.

What's next? A letter claiming that, since the Spartans owned slaves and beat their young, I do the same?

The times we live in.

Jason Bickel
jlbicke@rs6000.cmp.ilstu.edu

Today I received perhaps one of the most anticipated books in a long time. Ever since I found out that Frank Miller would be retelling the Spartans' story of Thermopylae, I have been hoping week after week that it would arrive. Today it did, and I am not disappointed — not by a long shot. First off, let me just say that I applaud the attempt to put historic events in comics form. As I am both an avid comics fan and a history major at Illinois State University, *300* meshes two of my interests in a stunning format. The tale itself is, well, spartan in its simplicity, yet it still gives the reader the complete tale. It relates the Spartan credo and ethic better than many, many books I have read on the subject. The opening sequence of marching and the final scene of slaughtering the Persian envoy tell of that society in a more visceral, immediate way than any textbook can. This work, much like *Watchmen*, *Kingdom Come*, and *The Dark Knight Returns*, should go down as a work of history unto itself. You have a devoted fan in me. Mr. David MacDonald, my Ancient Greece professor, will be one of the first people I will share *300* with. I'll let you know his reactions before too long. I will be eagerly

anticipating the next issue.

P.S. I really enjoyed the foreshadowing of things to come with the story of Leonidas and the wolf getting trapped in the narrow pass. I guess the wolf couldn't fit through those "hot gates."

Greg Spyridis
Bothell, WA

I was, about the same time you did *Dark Knight*, an avid comics reader. Time and more demanding commitments forced me to cut back pretty heavily over the last several years, though. One of those commitments, which is half the driving force of this letter, was following my profession as a stunt combatant and martial historian. Essentially, people pay me to create, perform, and consult on fights and wars from various periods in history. My specialties are pretty eclectic, including arts and tactics from dozens of periods and places all over the world, but at its heart is the ancient, classical Greek Age. What's more, specifically I focus on the personal and melee combat of Athens and Sparta from 100 to 300 B.C.

But I digress. I was saying how I don't read much in the way of comics anymore. The reason I tell you this is so you can understand how surprised I was when a friend and fellow stunt combatant came to me and told me about *300*. "It's the battle at Thermopylae," he said. "Leonidas and all." Instantly, I began bombarding him with questions: "Who's doing it?" "Are they going to wimp out on the Spartans?" "Please tell me they aren't going to butcher it!" He couldn't answer any of them; no one seemed to know much about it. The only information he had — and it did make me feel quite a bit better — was that Frank Miller was at the helm. I calmed down enough to sit back and wait. Because, you see, in addition to being a historian and combatant, I am also a Spartan: the son of a migrant from Arhangellos, a small village on the Southern border of the region. I was raised hearing stories of Leonidas, my heritage, and the courage at that pass. My blood still pounds at the thought of that battle. I wanted to see the story done right, or I wanted to see it done not at all.

So now I sit with the first issue to the side of me at my desk. I have read it twice just to be sure I didn't miss anything. And, while it is too late to make this long story short, I can simply say I am pleased. Very pleased. As a matter of fact, I am ecstatic. It may be too early for me to know if you are going to keep true to history, and it may be too early for me to tell if you are going to pomp and fluff your way past one of the most controversial (referring to Spartan mannerisms and lifestyles) and important wars in Greek history; it is not too early for me to say you are doing a damned fine job so far. The art is fabulous and is beautifully understated when depicting some of the more adult aspects of that life. The writing is subtle, gripping, and immensely powerful. And, best of all, the story is essentially intact!

In closing, I would like to say thank you for a great comic and for bringing what I feel to be one of the greatest battles in history to the public's eye. I would also beg and plead that you don't give anyone the rights to the movie version until I can do it or at least be a part of it. Heh. And, finally, I leave you with what has always been my favorite alleged "quote" from the war, and a philosophy I try to live my life on: "The Persian arrows are so numerous that they fill the sky and block out the sun? That is good; we shall get to fight in the shade."

Yeah, I've always loved that quote. There's nothing like putting together a script with all the best lines written for you — by history.

Scott St. Pierre
Peabody, MA

Your ass ages like wine . . . just like friggin' wine.

Aw. Now you've got me blushing.

— Frank Miller

Next issue:

VICTORY

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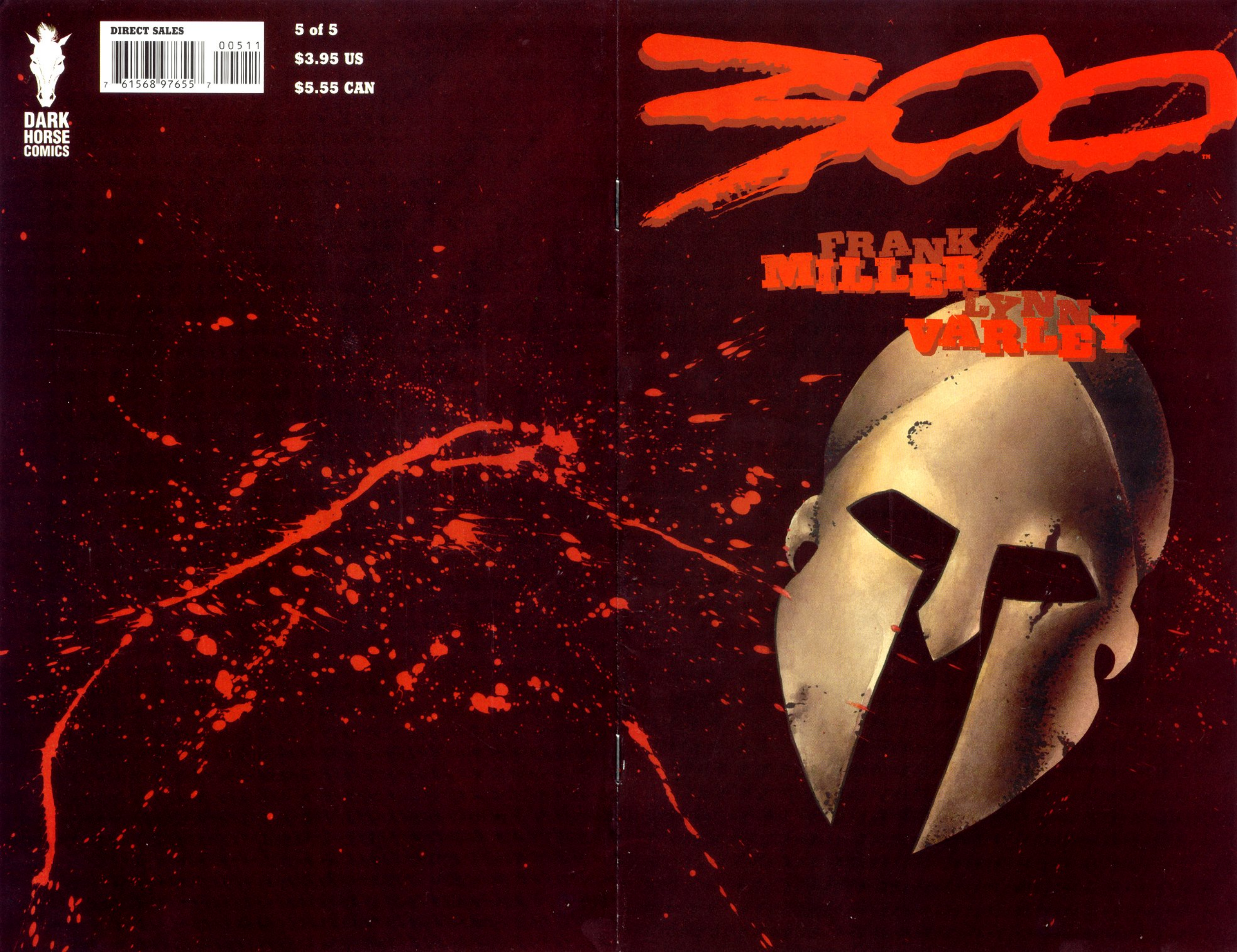
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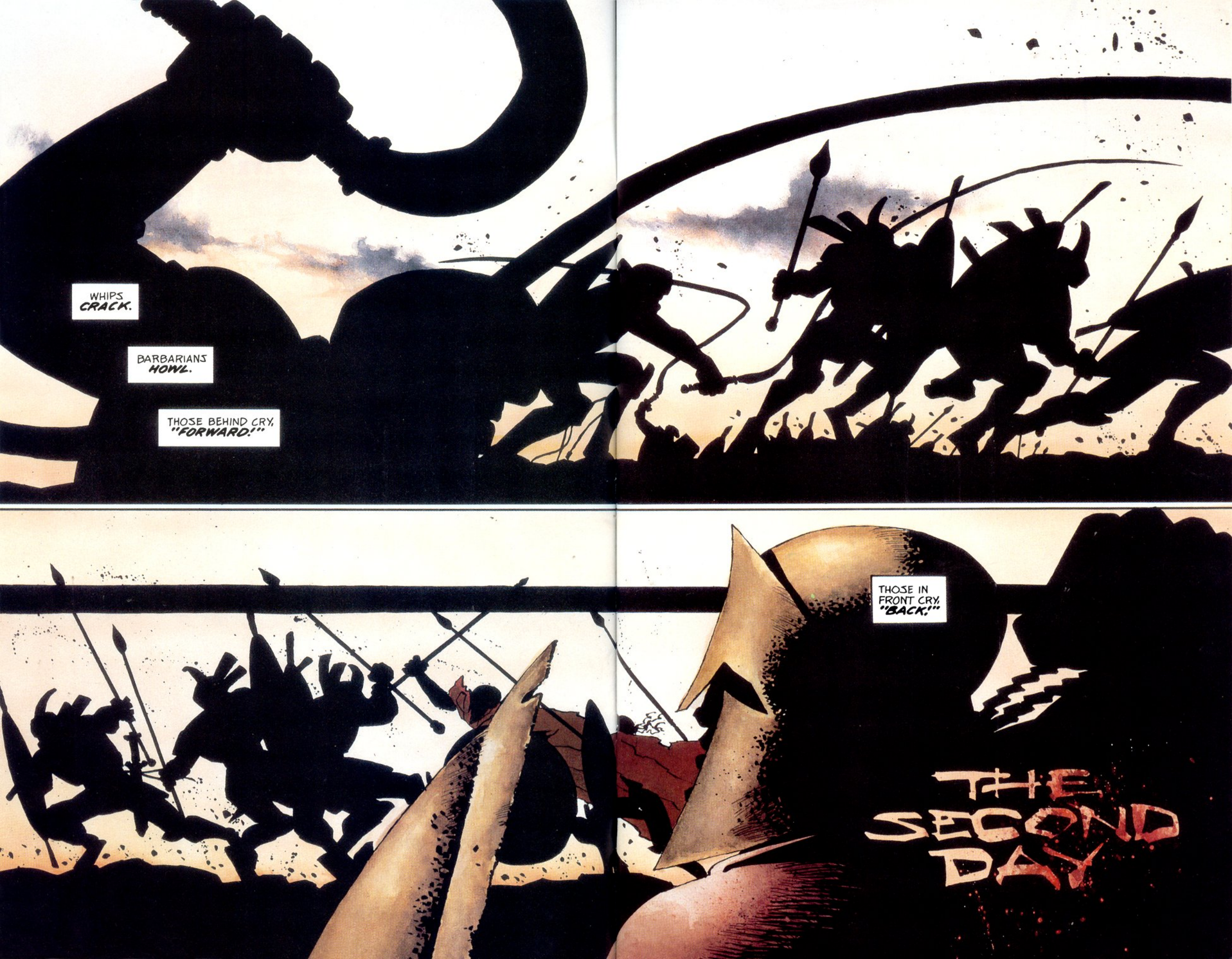
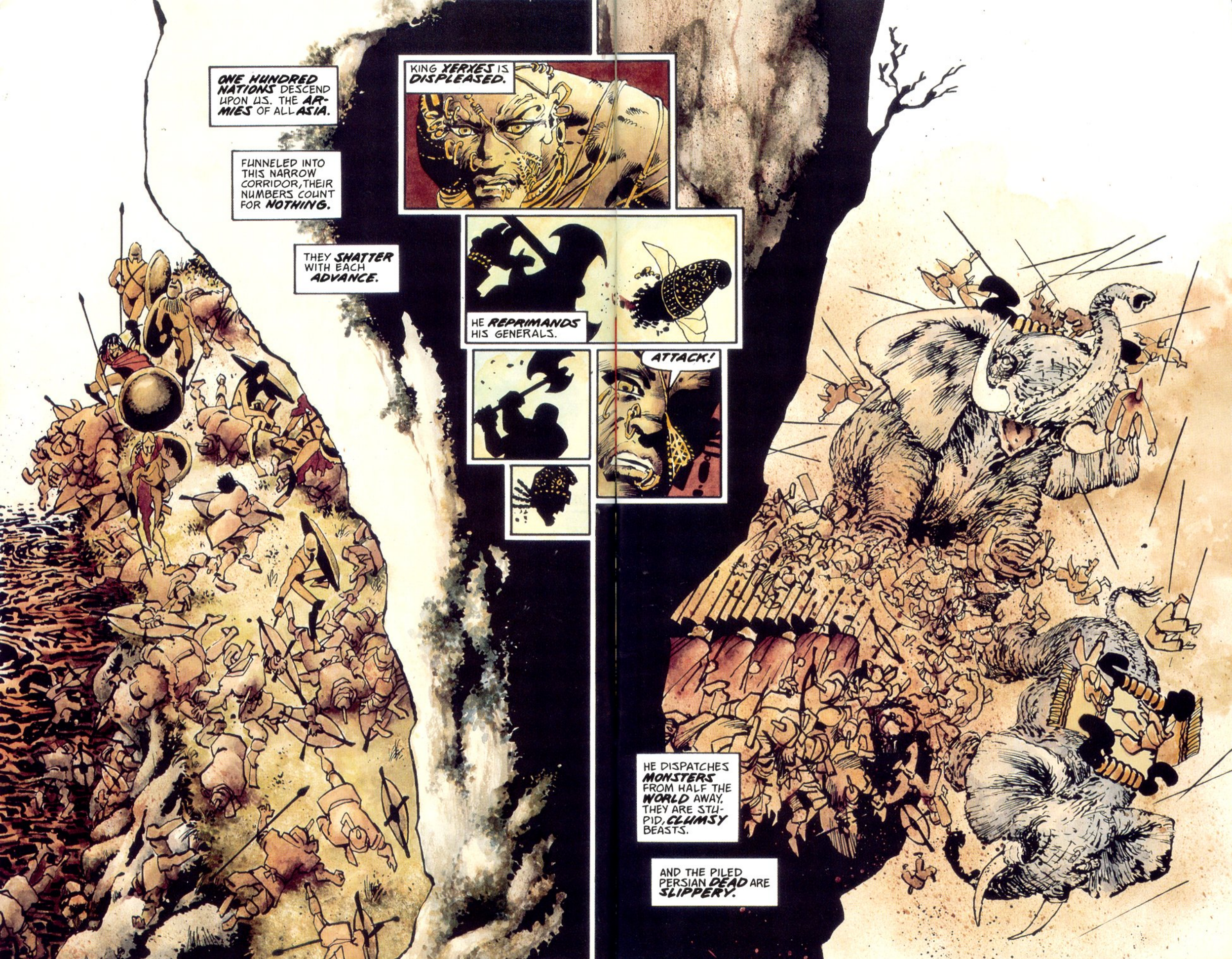
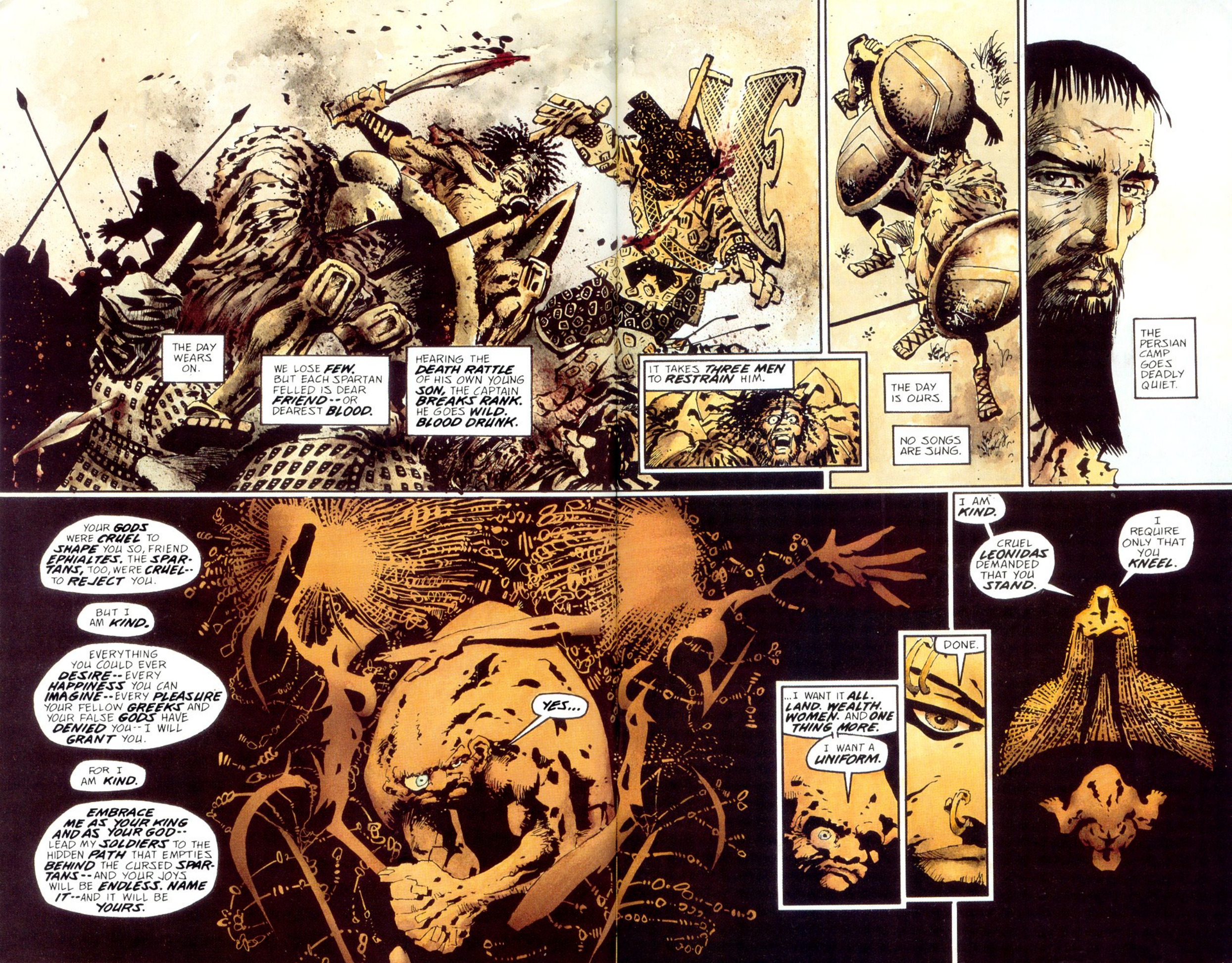
CHAPTER FIVE:

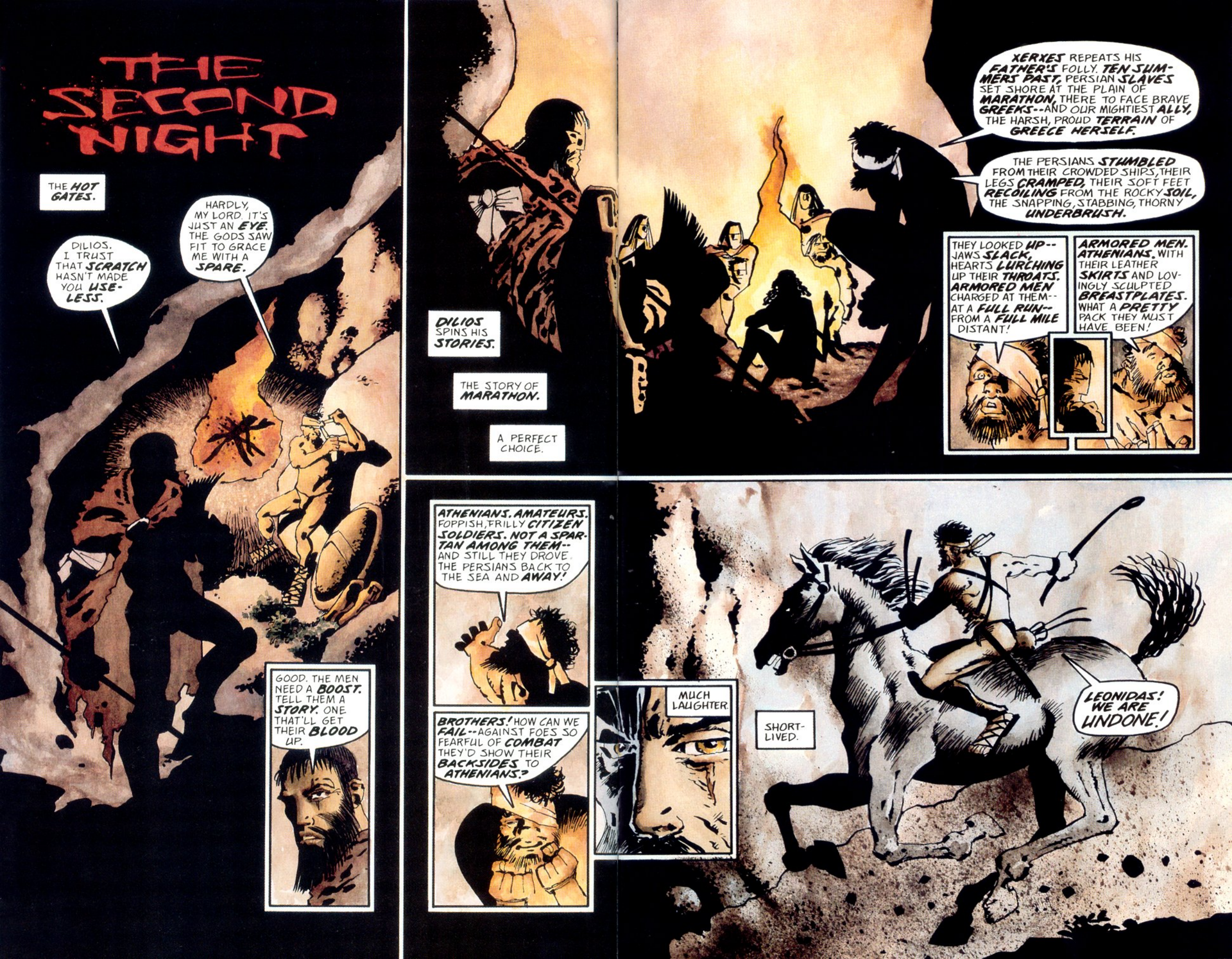
VICTORY

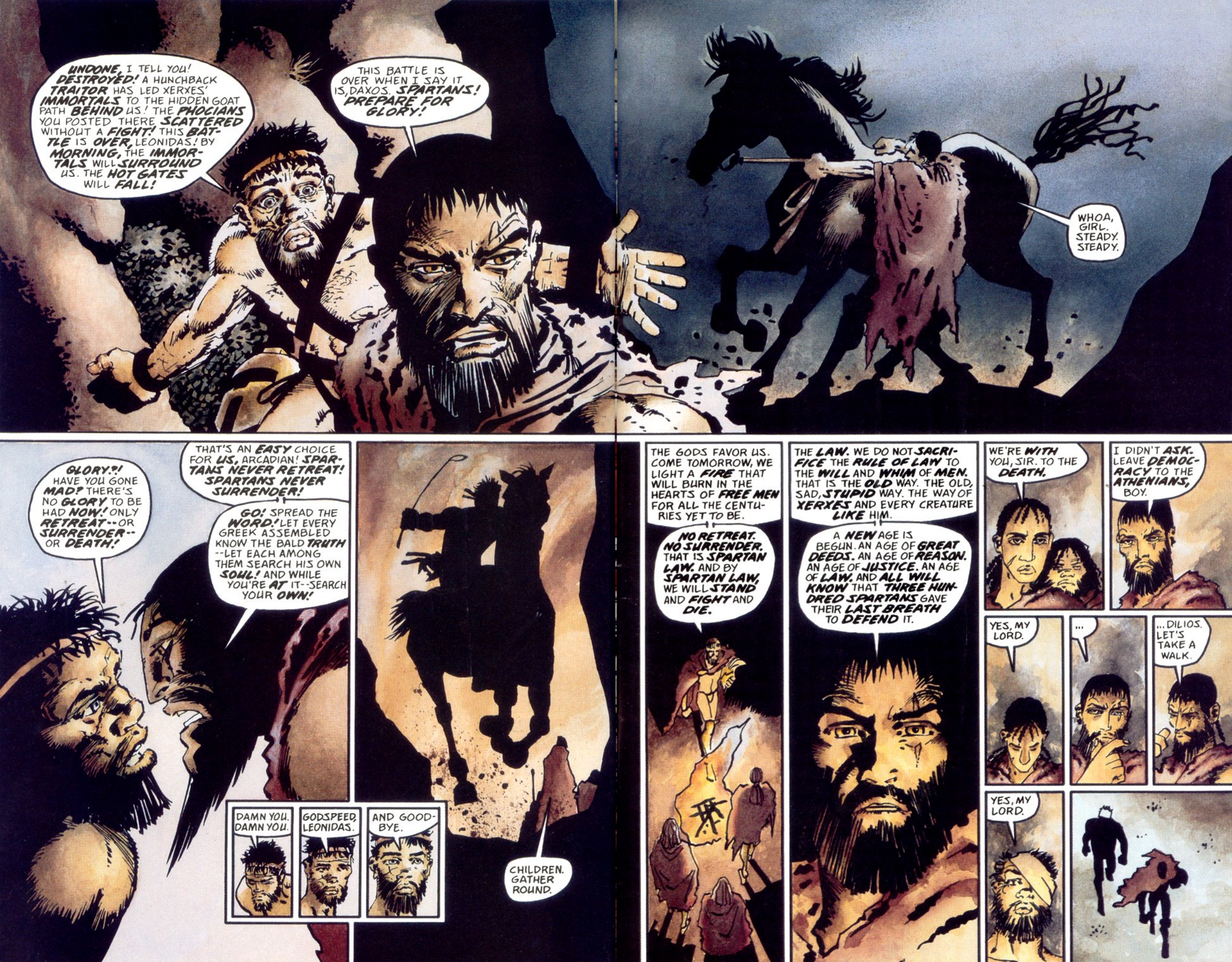

WHIPS CRACK.
BARBARIANS HOWL.
THOSE BEHIND CRY, "FORWARD!"
THOSE IN FRONT CRY, "BACK!"
THE SECOND DAY

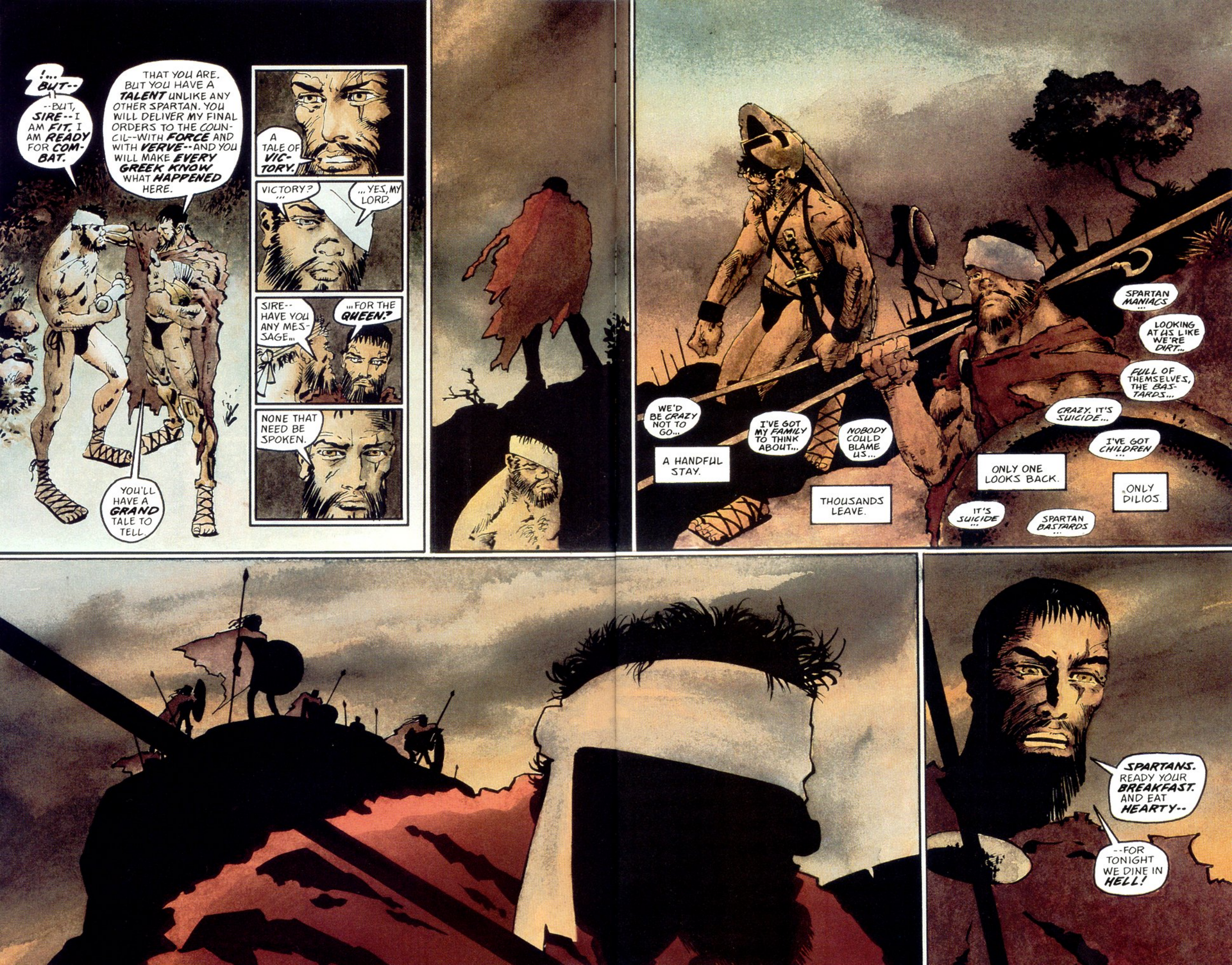


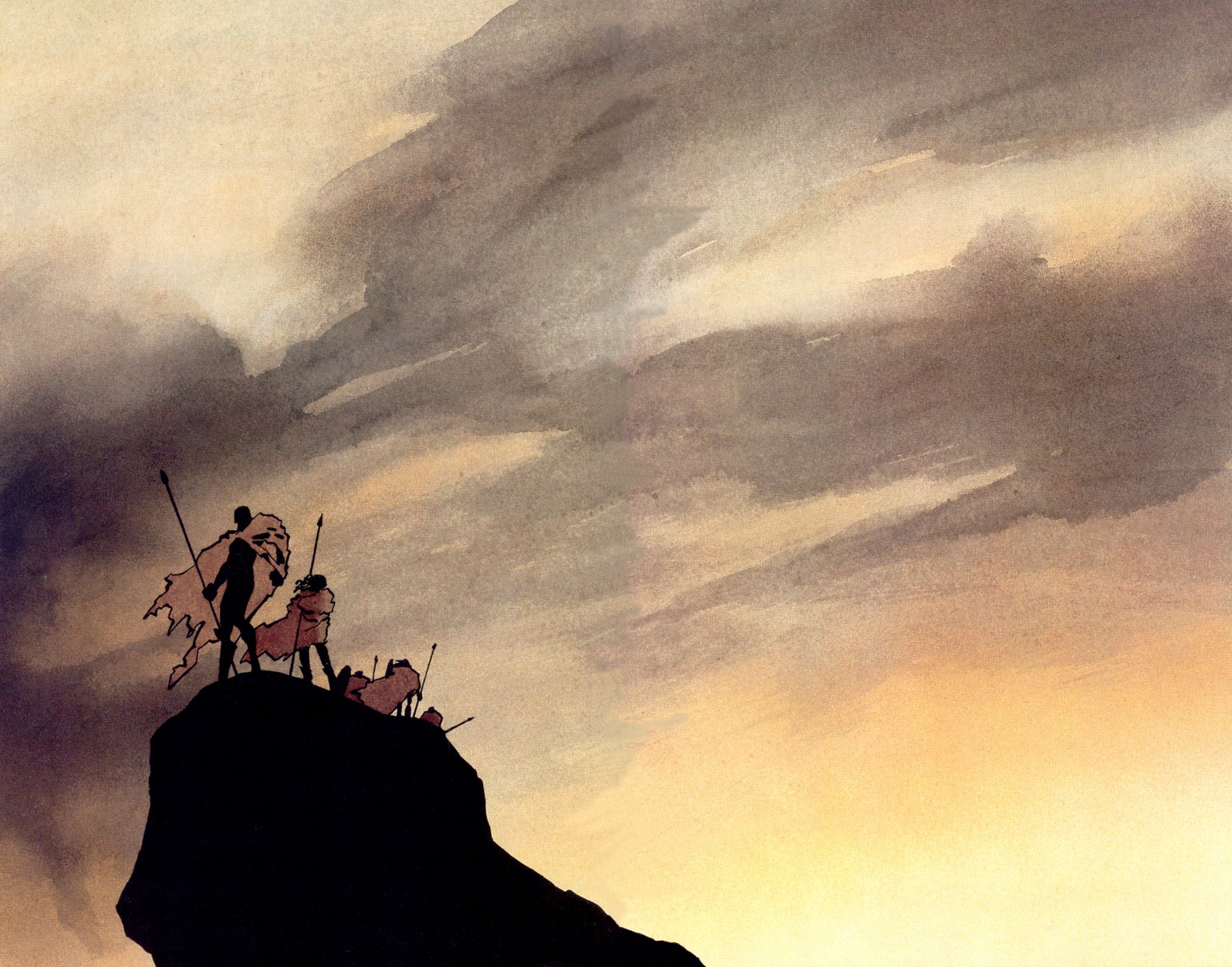
ONE HUNDRED NATIONS DESCEND UPON US. THE ARMIES OF ALL ASIA.
FUNNELED INTO THIS NARROW CORRIDOR, THEIR NUMBERS COUNT FOR NOTHING.
THEY SHATTER WITH EACH ADVANCE.
KING XERXES IS DISPLEASED.
HE REPRIMANDS HIS GENERALS.
ATTACK!
HE DISPATCHES MONSTERS FROM HALF THE WORLD AWAY. THEY ARE STUPID, CLUMSY BEASTS.
AND THE PILED PERSIAN DEAD ARE SLIPPERY.

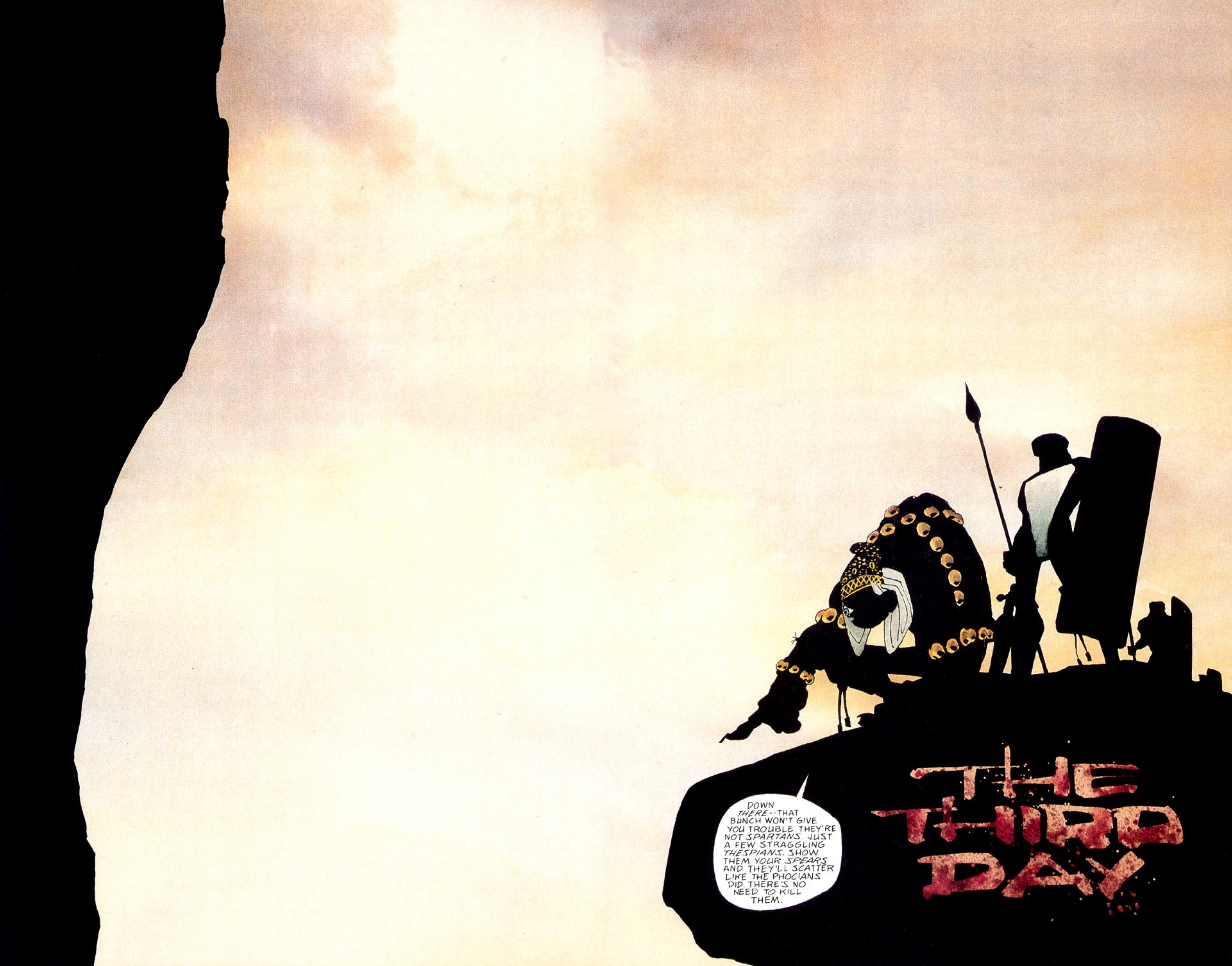

THE DAY WEARS ON.
WE LOSE FEW. BUT EACH SPARTAN FELLED IS DEAR FRIEND--OR DEAREST BLOOD.
HEARING THE DEATH RATTLE OF HIS OWN YOUNG SON, THE CAPTAIN BREAKS RANK. HE GOES WILD. BLOOD DRUNK.
IT TAKES THREE MEN TO RESTRAIN HIM.
THE DAY IS OURS.
NO SONGS ARE SUNG.
THE PERSIAN CAMP GOES DEADLY QUIET.
YOUR GODS WERE CRUEL TO SHAPE YOU SO, FRIEND EPHIALTES. THE SPARTANS, TOO, WERE CRUEL--TO REJECT YOU.
BUT I AM KIND.
EVERYTHING YOU COULD EVER DESIRE--EVERY HAPPINESS YOU CAN IMAGINE--EVERY PLEASURE YOUR FELLOW GREEKS AND YOUR FALSE GODS HAVE DENIED YOU--I WILL GRANT YOU.
FOR I AM KIND.
EMBRACE ME AS YOUR KING AND AS YOUR GOD--LEAD MY SOLDIERS TO THE HIDDEN PATH THAT EMPTIES BEHIND THE CURSED SPARTANS--AND YOUR JOYS WILL BE ENDLESS. NAME IT--AND IT WILL BE YOURS.
YES...
...I WANT IT ALL. LAND. WEALTH. WOMEN. AND ONE THING MORE.
I WANT A UNIFORM.
DONE.
I AM KIND.
CRUEL LEONIDAS DEMANDED THAT YOU STAND.
I REQUIRE ONLY THAT YOU KNEEL.

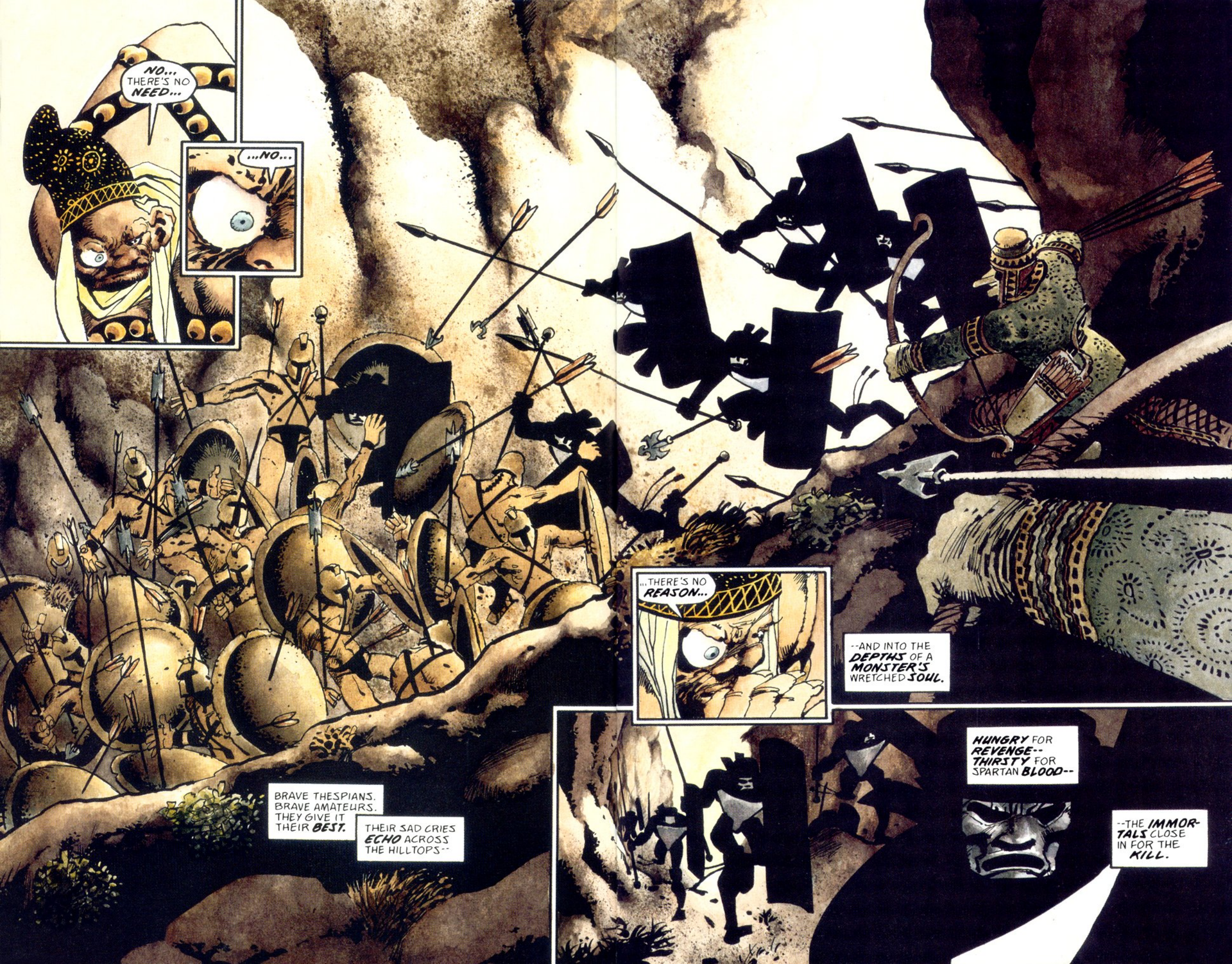

THE SECOND NIGHT
THE HOT GATES.
DILIOS. I TRUST THAT SCRATCH HASN'T MADE YOU USELESS.
HARDLY, MY LORD. IT'S JUST AN EYE. THE GODS SAW FIT TO GRACE ME WITH A SPARE.
GOOD. THE MEN NEED A BOOST. TELL THEM A STORY. ONE THAT'LL GET THEIR BLOOD UP.
DILIOS SPINS HIS STORIES.
THE STORY OF MARATHON.
A PERFECT CHOICE.
XERXES REPEATS HIS FATHER'S FOLLY. TEN SUMMERS PAST, PERSIAN SLAVES SET SHORE AT THE PLAIN OF MARATHON, THERE TO FACE BRAVE GREEKS--AND OUR MIGHTIEST ALLY, THE HARSH, PROUD TERRAIN OF GREECE HERSELF.
THE PERSIANS STUMBLED FROM THEIR CROWDED SHIPS, THEIR LEGS CRAMPED, THEIR SOFT FEET RECOILING FROM THE ROCKY SOIL, THE SNAPPING, STABBING, THORNY UNDERBRUSH.
THEY LOOKED UP--JAWS SLACK, HEARTS LURCHING UP THEIR THROATS. ARMORED MEN CHARGED AT THEM--AT A FULL RUN--FROM A FULL MILE DISTANT!
ARMORED MEN. ATHENIANS. WITH THEIR LEATHER SKIRTS AND LOVINGLY SCULPTED BREASTPLATES. WHAT A PRETTY PACK THEY MUST HAVE BEEN!
ATHENIANS. AMATEURS. FOPPISH, FRILLY CITIZEN SOLDIERS. NOT A SPARTAN AMONG THEM--AND STILL THEY DROVE THE PERSIANS BACK TO THE SEA AND AWAY!
BROTHERS! HOW CAN WE FAIL--AGAINST FOES SO FEARFUL OF COMBAT THEY'D SHOW THEIR BACKSIDES TO ATHENIANS?
MUCH LAUGHTER.
SHORT-LIVED.
LEONIDAS! WE ARE UNDONE!


UNDONE, I TELL YOU! DESTROYED! A HUNCHBACK TRAITOR HAS LED XERXES' IMMORTALS TO THE HIDDEN GOAT PATH BEHIND US! THE PHOCIANS YOU POSTED THERE SCATTERED WITHOUT A FIGHT! THIS BATTLE IS OVER, LEONIDAS! BY MORNING, THE IMMORTALS WILL SURROUND US. THE HOT GATES WILL FALL!
THIS BATTLE IS OVER WHEN I SAY IT IS, DAXOS. SPARTANS! PREPARE FOR GLORY!
WHOA, GIRL. STEADY. STEADY.
GLORY?! HAVE YOU GONE MAD? THERE'S NO GLORY TO BE HAD NOW! ONLY RETREAT--OR SURRENDER--OR DEATH!
THAT'S AN EASY CHOICE FOR US, ARCADIAN! SPARTANS NEVER RETREAT! SPARTANS NEVER SURRENDER!
GO! SPREAD THE WORD! LET EVERY GREEK ASSEMBLED KNOW THE BALD TRUTH --LET EACH AMONG THEM SEARCH HIS OWN SOUL! AND WHILE YOU'RE AT IT--SEARCH YOUR OWN!
DAMN YOU. DAMN YOU.
GODSPEED, LEONIDAS.
AND GOOD-BYE.
CHILDREN. GATHER ROUND.
THE GODS FAVOR US. COME TOMORROW, WE LIGHT A FIRE THAT WILL BURN IN THE HEARTS OF FREE MEN FOR ALL THE CENTURIES YET TO BE.
NO RETREAT. NO SURRENDER. THAT IS SPARTAN LAW. AND BY SPARTAN LAW, WE WILL STAND AND FIGHT AND DIE.
THE LAW. WE DO NOT SACRIFICE THE RULE OF LAW TO THE WILL AND WHIM OF MEN. THAT IS THE OLD WAY. THE OLD, SAD, STUPID WAY. THE WAY OF XERXES AND EVERY CREATURE LIKE HIM.
A NEW AGE IS BEGUN. AN AGE OF GREAT DEEDS. AN AGE OF REASON. AN AGE OF JUSTICE. AN AGE OF LAW. AND ALL WILL KNOW THAT THREE HUNDRED SPARTANS GAVE THEIR LAST BREATH TO DEFEND IT.
WE'RE WITH YOU, SIR. TO THE DEATH.
I DIDN'T ASK. LEAVE DEMOCRACY TO THE ATHENIANS, BOY.
YES, MY LORD.
...
...DILIOS. LET'S TAKE A WALK.
YES, MY LORD.


!... BUT--
--BUT, SIRE--I AM FIT. I AM READY FOR COMBAT.
THAT YOU ARE. BUT YOU HAVE A TALENT UNLIKE ANY OTHER SPARTAN. YOU WILL DELIVER MY FINAL ORDERS TO THE COUNCIL--WITH FORCE AND WITH VERVE--AND YOU WILL MAKE EVERY GREEK KNOW WHAT HAPPENED HERE.
YOU'LL HAVE A GRAND TALE TO TELL.
A TALE OF VICTORY.
VICTORY? ...
...YES, MY LORD.
SIRE-- HAVE YOU ANY MESSAGE--
...FOR THE QUEEN?
NONE THAT NEED BE SPOKEN.
A HANDFUL STAY.
WE'D BE CRAZY NOT TO GO...
I'VE GOT MY FAMILY TO THINK ABOUT...
NOBODY COULD BLAME US...
THOUSANDS LEAVE.
SPARTAN MANIACS ...
LOOKING AT US LIKE WE'RE DIRT...
FULL OF THEMSELVES, THE BASTARDS...
CRAZY. IT'S SUICIDE...
I'VE GOT CHILDREN ...
ONLY ONE LOOKS BACK.
ONLY DILIOS.
IT'S SUICIDE ...
SPARTAN BASTARDS ...
SPARTANS. READY YOUR BREAKFAST AND EAT HEARTY--
--FOR TONIGHT WE DINE IN HELL!

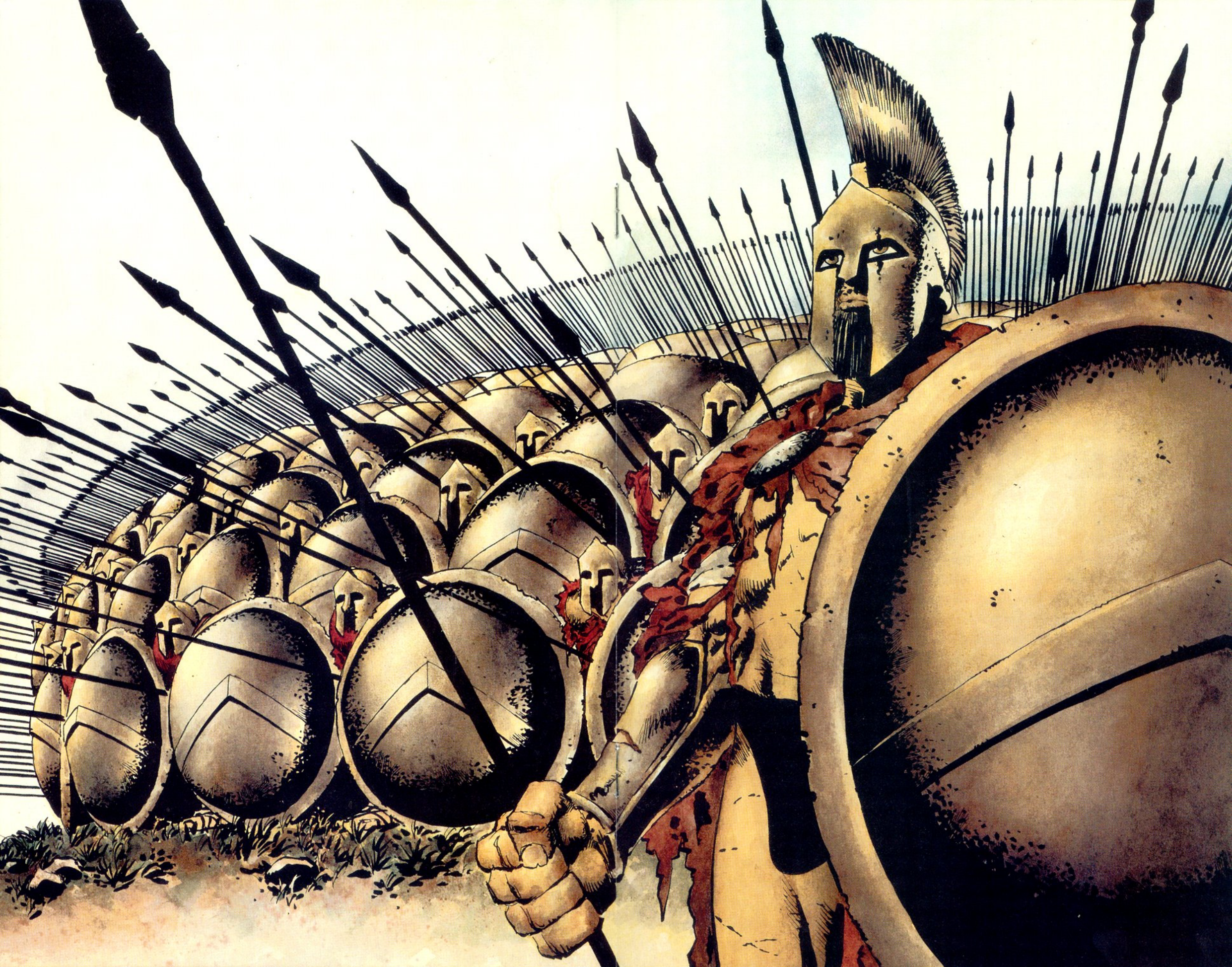



DOWN THERE--THAT BUNCH WON'T GIVE YOU TROUBLE. THEY'RE NOT SPARTANS. JUST A FEW STRAGGLING THESPIANS. SHOW THEM YOUR SPEARS AND THEY'LL SCATTER LIKE THE PHOCIANS DID. THERE'S NO NEED TO KILL THEM.
THE THIRD DAY



NO... THERE'S NO NEED...
...NO...
BRAVE THESPIANS. BRAVE AMATEURS. THEY GIVE IT THEIR BEST.
THEIR SAD CRIES ECHO ACROSS THE HILLTOPS--
...THERE'S NO REASON...
--AND INTO THE DEPTHS OF A MONSTER'S WRETCHED SOUL.
HUNGRY FOR REVENGE-- THIRSTY FOR SPARTAN BLOOD--
--THE IMMORTALS CLOSE IN FOR THE KILL.

MY COMPLIMENTS, LEONIDAS. YOU PLAY A CLEVER GAME--AND YOU PLAY IT WELL.
MY COMPLIMENTS--AND MY CONGRATULATIONS. YOU HAVE SURELY TURNED CALAMITY INTO VICTORY. DESPITE YOUR INSUFFERABLE ARROGANCE, THE GOD-KING HAS COME TO ADMIRE SPARTAN VALOR AND FIGHTING SKILL. YOU WILL MAKE A MIGHTY ALLY.
YIELD, LEONIDAS. USE YOUR REASON. THINK OF YOUR MEN.
I BEG YOU.
LISTEN TO YOUR FELLOW GREEK. HE CAN ATTEST TO THE DIVINE ONE'S GENEROSITY. DESPITE YOUR SEVERAL INSULTS --DESPITE YOUR HORRID BLASPHEMIES--THE LORD OF HOSTS IS PREPARED TO FORGIVE ALL--AND MORE, TO REWARD YOUR SERVICE.
YOU FIGHT FOR YOUR LANDS? KEEP THEM! YOU FIGHT FOR SPARTA? SHE WILL BE WEALTHIER AND MORE POWERFUL THAN EVER BEFORE! YOU FIGHT FOR YOUR KINGSHIP? YOU WILL BE PROCLAIMED WAR-LORD OF ALL GREECE--ANSWERABLE ONLY TO THE ONE TRUE MASTER OF THE WORLD!
YOUR VICTORY WILL BE COMPLETE--IF YOU BUT LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS AND KNEEL TO HOLY XERXES!



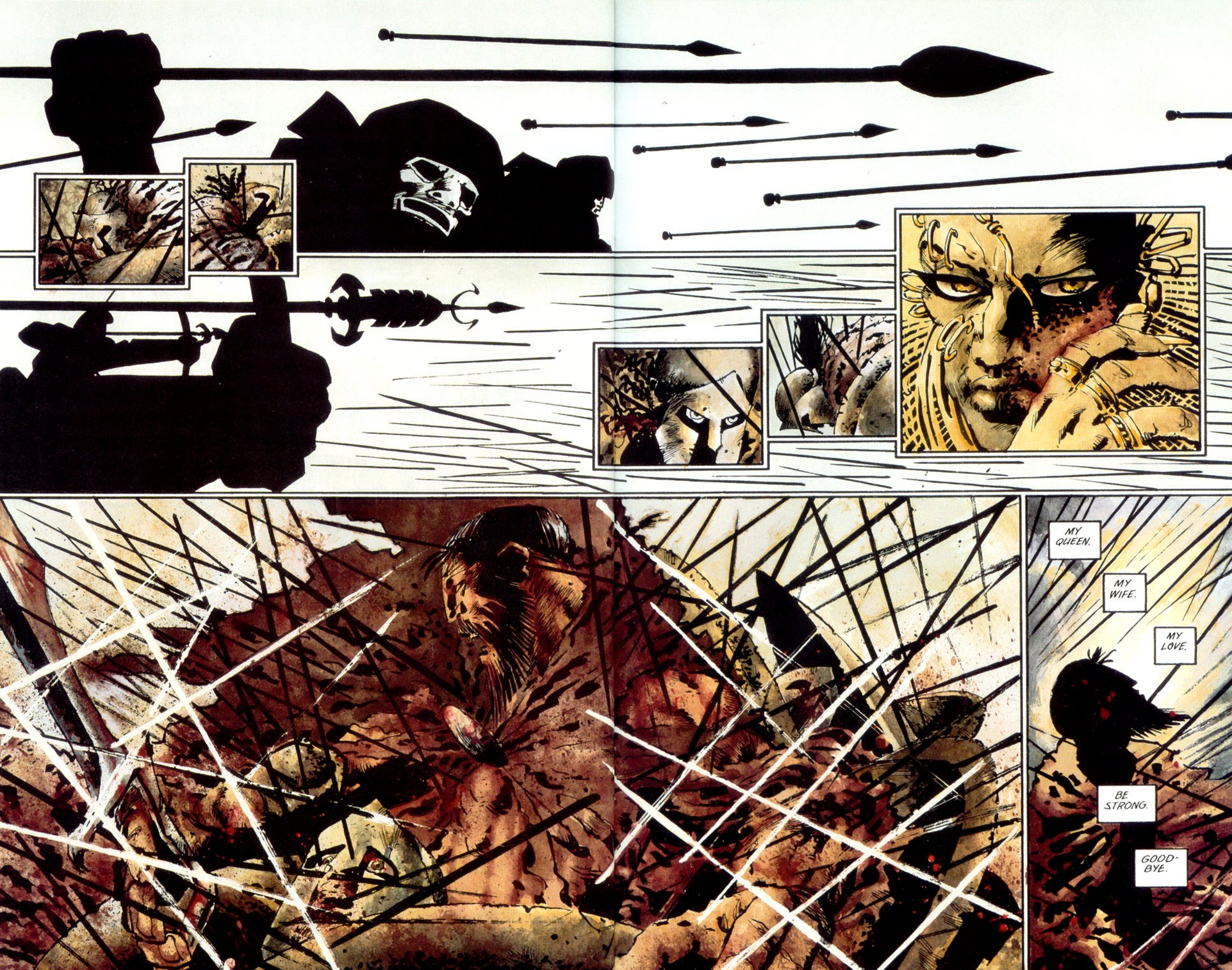
IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN FORTY YEARS SINCE THE WOLF AND THE WINTER COLD.
NOW, AS THEN, IT IS NOT FEAR THAT GRIPS HIM. ONLY A RESTLESS-NESS, A HEIGHTENED SENSE OF THINGS.
THE SEABORNE BREEZE COOLLY KISSING THE SWEAT AT HIS CHEST AND NECK. GULLS CAW-ING, COMPLAINING EVEN AS THEY FEAST ON THOUSANDS OF FLOATING DEAD.
THE STEADY BREATHING OF THE THREE HUNDRED BOYS AT HIS BACK--READY TO DIE FOR HIM WITHOUT A MOMENT'S PAUSE, EVERY ONE OF THEM.
READY TO DIE.
THEY THINK THEY KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.

HIS HELMET IS STIFLING.
TONK
KANK
HIS SHIELD IS HEAVY.
YOUR SPEAR.
YOU THERE. EPHIALTES.
MAY YOU LIVE FOREVER.
YOUR SPEAR, LEONIDAS.
TOK
STELIOS.

KUNCH
GOOD BOY.
SLAUGHTER THEM!
SLAUGHTER THEM!
HIS HELMET WAS STIFLING. IT NARROWED HIS VISION.
AND HE MUST SEE FAR.
HIS SHIELD WAS HEAVY. IT THREW OFF HIS BALANCE.
AND HIS TARGET IS FAR AWAY:
XERXES--

--DIE!
THE OLD ONES CLAIM WE SPARTANS DESCEND FROM HERAKLES HIMSELF.
BOLD LEONIDAS GIVES TESTAMENT TO OUR BLOODLINE. HIS ROAR IS LONG AND LOUD AND FULL OF LAUGHTER.
STARING DEATH SQUARE IN THE EYE--HE LAUGHS.

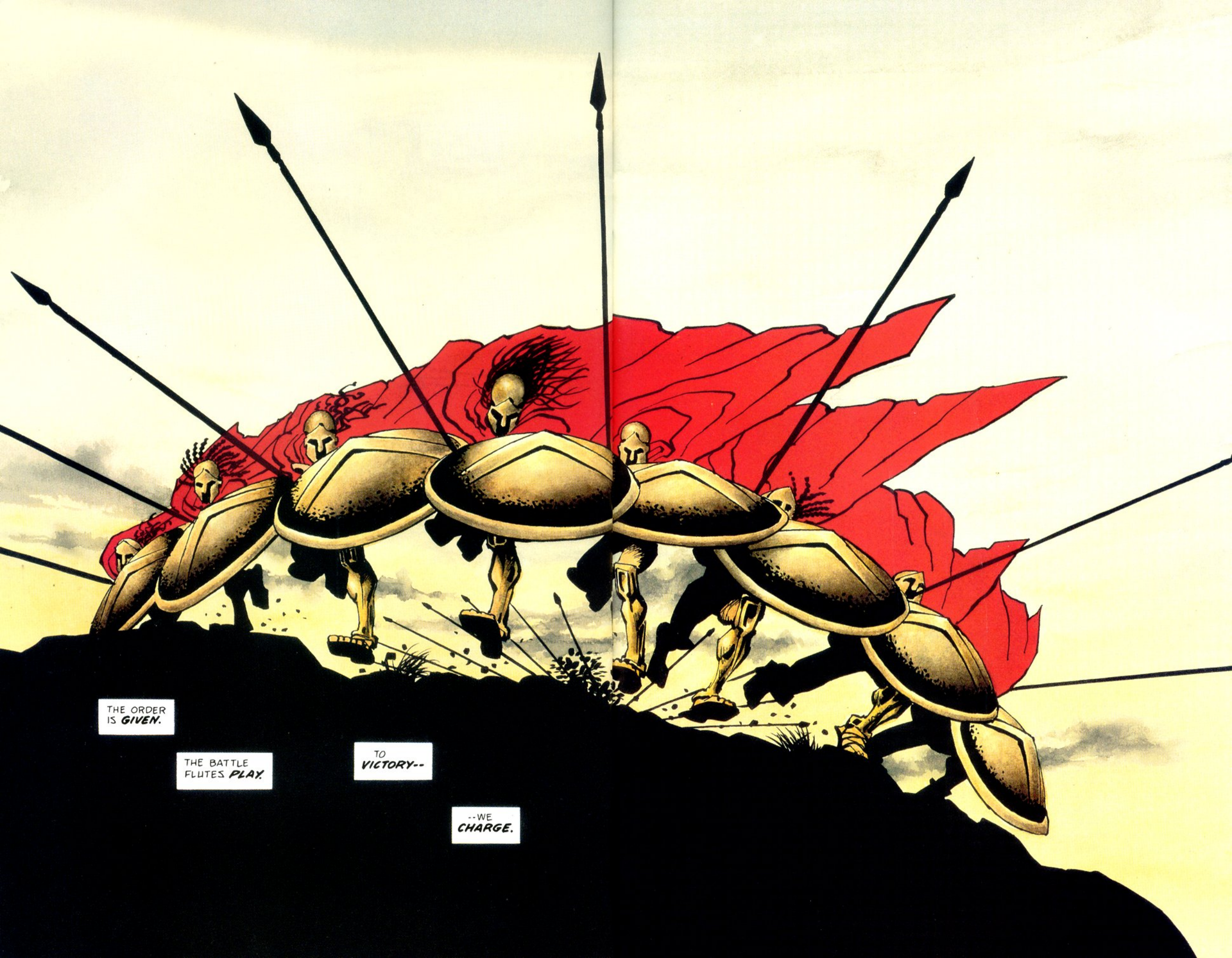
KUNCH


MY QUEEN.
MY WIFE.
MY LOVE.
BE STRONG.
GOOD-BYE.

REMEMBER US.

SHOULD ANY FREE SOUL COME ACROSS THIS PLACE--
--IN ALL THE COUNTLESS CENTURIES YET TO BE--
--MAY OUR VOICES WHISPER TO YOU FROM THE AGELESS STONES.
GO TELL THE SPARTANS, PASSERBY:
THAT HERE, BY SPARTAN LAW, WE LIE.

AND SO MY KING DIED. AND SO MY BROTHERS DIED. BARELY A YEAR AGO.
LONG I PONDERED MY KING'S CRYPTIC TALK OF VICTORY. AND TIME PROVED HIM WISE. FROM FREE GREEK TO FREE GREEK SPREAD THE WORD--
--THAT BOLD LEONIDAS AND HIS THREE HUNDRED, SO FAR FROM HOME, LAID DOWN THEIR LIVES, NOT JUST FOR SPARTA, BUT FOR ALL GREECE-- AND THE PROMISE OUR COUNTRY HOLDS.
OUR COUNTRY. OUR NATION. INSPIRED NOW, UNITED--SETTING ASIDE PAST RIVALRIES, JOINING FORCES TO DRIVE THE INVADER FROM OUR SHORES.
FROM OUR SHORES-- AND FROM OUR SEAS.
CAPTAIN DILIOS SPINS HIS STORIES.
HIS BEST STORY.
THE ONE ABOUT THE HOT GATES.
THE HOT GATES-- AND BEYOND.
IN THE WATERS OF SALAMIS, ATHENIAN SEAFARING MASTERY LED THE UNITED GREEK NAVY TO SHATTER THE PERSIAN ARMADA!
AND NOW-- HERE--ON THIS ROCKY, RAGGED PATCH OF GREECE WE CALL PLATAEA-- XERXES' HORDES FACE OBLITERATION!
THE BARBARIANS HUDDLE, SHEER TERROR GRIPPING TIGHT THEIR HEARTS WITH ICY FINGERS, KNOWING WHAT THEY SUFFERED AT THE SPEARS AND SWORDS OF THE THREE HUNDRED. THEY STARE ACROSS THIS PLAIN AT TEN THOUSAND SPARTANS-- COMMANDING THIRTY THOUSAND FREE GREEKS!
THE ENEMY OUTNUMBERS US A PALTRY THREE TO ONE. GOOD ODDS FOR ANY GREEK. THIS DAY, WE RESCUE A WORLD FROM THE OLD, DARK, STUPID WAYS--AND WE USHER IN A FUTURE THAT IS SURELY BRIGHTER THAN ANY WE CAN IMAGINE. GIVE THANKS, MEN, TO LEONIDAS AND HIS BRAVE THREE HUNDRED--
--AND READY YOURSELVES FOR WAR!


THE ORDER IS GIVEN.
THE BATTLE FLUTES PLAY.
TO VICTORY--
--WE CHARGE.

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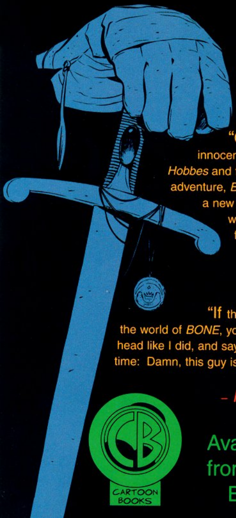

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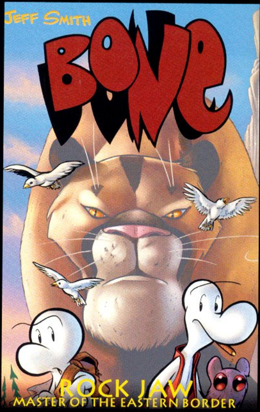

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